

LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS

823

St25ⁿ

v. 1

A NEW FACE AT THE DOOR.

VOL. I.

NEW AND POPULAR NOVELS

AT ALL THE LIBRARIES

THE SPORT OF CHANCE. By WILLIAM SHARP.
3 vols.

SWEET IS TRUE LOVE. By KATHARINE KING, author
of 'The Queen of the Regiment,' 'Off the Roll,' &c. 2 vols.

A DOUBLE WEDDING. By the Author of 'St. Olave's,'
'Janita's Cross,' 'Annette,' &c. 3 vols.

THE GAY WORLD. By JOSEPH HATTON, author of
'Clytie,' 'Cruel London,' &c. 3 vols.

CAST ON THE WATERS. By HUGH COLEMAN
DAVIDSON, author of 'The Green Hills by the Sea.' 3 vols.

HURST & BLACKETT, 13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

A NEW FACE AT THE DOOR

BY

JANE STANLEY

AUTHOR OF "A DAUGHTER OF THE GODS."

'There's a new foot on the floor, my friend,
And a new face at the door, my friend,
A new face at the door.'

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, LIMITED,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1888.

All Rights Reserved.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2010 with funding from
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

823
St 25m
v. 1

A NEW FACE AT THE DOOR.

CHAPTER I.

1 Oct. 53
‘CHANGE here for Brent, Kingsbridge, Ivy-
bridge——’

13 Aug. 53
A poorly-dressed girl, in a third-class carriage, sprang up and began collecting bags and wraps. A young man, who looked too pronounced a ‘masher’ to be in the habit of travelling third-class, came to her help. He had jumped in at the last station regardless of railway regulations, just as the train was beginning to move. Having diligently studied his companion’s very regular profile, he looked eagerly at the full face now offered to his gaze. It was

rather disappointing, he thought. There was a want of roundness and colour for which perfect outline of feature could scarcely compensate. Even the deep-set grey eyes had a cold look under their long black lashes.

‘Not nearly so pretty as her photo,’ was his mental comment as he left her in charge of a porter. Unconscious of his recognition, Opal Carew watched the young man passing out of the station, with the double regret that their way lay no longer together and that she had not made more of her opportunity. A born flirt of the quiet kind, she did not usually let her chance slip when fate threw a worthy prey in her path. But she had been restrained by the consciousness that no levity was permissible in the part she was about to play on a new stage. The part itself was by no means new to her : for five years she had been working as a governess. Homeless and friendless, with no special advantages

of education, she found it difficult with all her care and unwilling self-denial to make both ends meet. She had been filling the post of holiday governess in a family at Dawlish, glad to escape the necessity of finding board and lodging for herself during the few weeks which elapsed between her leaving one situation and entering another. Dawlish in August had been a pleasant change from London, but Opal hated the country. As the train bore her away from all signs of what she called civilization to a region with which she was destined to share a somewhat ghastly celebrity, she regretted vainly that her new lot was cast in the wilds of Devonshire.

‘I might have held out a few weeks longer. Life isn’t worth having in a place like this. Why, it isn’t a place at all,’ she thought, as they stopped at a dreary country station with no sign of human habitation save one public-house, a square, ugly building of grey stone with a background

of grey hills, the beginning of the moors, which were the pride of the district.

No one got out but Opal; she and her dented yellow box were quickly set down and left on the platform. Just outside the station stood a dilapidated-looking one-horse fly.

‘From the Glebe House—Mr. Daman’s?’ said Opal.

The man touched his hat.

‘Can you shut it up?’ she asked, with a disgusted glance at the vehicle.

It was still September, but a cold mist was creeping up and a drizzling rain beginning to fall. Opal liked warmth and shelter; besides, she had a feather in her hat. With a great deal of creaking, the two sides of the fly were brought nearly together, but a current of air poured in through the gap, and the windows fell down again as fast as Opal pulled them up. She felt chilled to the bone as they rattled up and down the stony lanes. The

drive seemed endless, and there was nothing to break its dull monotony—not a house nor even a cottage to be seen, no light of household fires gleamed warm and bright.

Opal shuddered as she thought of the daily walks which she must take with her pupil, and pictured what the place would be like in the winter. It would not be easy to find an excuse for leaving. Servants might, and often did, object to a neighbourhood—they could afford to pick and choose; but Opal wondered how it would fare with a governess who complained that the country was dull, or objected to walk through muddy lanes. She had been thought lucky to get this place, with only one pupil, a little girl of seven, and kind people, who wished to make the governess quite one of the family.

‘Stupid people who want anyone to amuse them, I daresay,’ thought Opal. A new place usually suggested agreeable possibilities; but Opal did not reckon on

finding much excitement at Avonuish. 'There are no men to govern in this wood,' she repeated, dolefully.

A sudden jerk brought the horse to a stand-still, and, looking out, Opal saw a wooden gate with a square opening cut in it like the entrance to a fowl-house on a larger scale. The driver got down and made her a sign to let down the window which she had been holding up for the last mile in a desperate effort to keep one aperture at least closed.

Stepping through the gate, Opal found herself in a narrow drive, with wet bushes on each side, shutting off all view of the garden. Two dogs rushed out barking furiously.

To say that Opal was afraid of dogs might convey a false impression. Her fears extended to everything which could under any possible combination of circumstances threaten her safety. Yet, as the servant ran out to her, Opal did not look

as if she needed any assurance that the dogs would not bite. She was wise in her generation, and she knew that it was a generation which did not reckon timidity a grace in women. But Opal's distaste for her new home scarcely needed a scare on the threshold to confirm it. For a second she paused, mastering a wild desire to turn and drive back to the station. Most people know the strange sensation of doing something which seems like an echo of what has been done or felt in the past. A few may know the still stranger feeling which seems to give us a foretaste of something in the future. It flashed across Opal now, a vague intangible vision which had no reality in the present but seemed to paralyse her with an undefined terror of its fulfilment hereafter. Gone—before she could grasp its meaning or guess what connection there was between that blurred vision and the sensation of fear which accompanied it.

Then a delightful sense of warmth and light burst upon Opal as she came out of the chill mist and rain into a bright, prettily-furnished room such as she might have found in Kensington. A real winter fire blazed in the tiled grate, whilst fresh roses filled the room with the scents of summer. A Japanese tea-table with shelves standing out in every direction offered a tempting display of cakes and scones, which reminded Opal that she was hungry as well as cold and tired. And a smiling girl in a summer dress came to greet the new-comer as warmly as if she had been an invited guest instead of a hired governess.

‘Oh, poor thing, how cold you are!’ she exclaimed, as she took Opal’s hand. ‘Here,’ drawing a low chair close to the fire, ‘sit down and warm yourself, whilst I get you a cup of tea.’

There was an older lady in the room who smiled and nodded kindly. If she

did not come forward, it was evidently from no unfriendliness, but only because she felt too comfortable to move out of the very easy chair in which she was reclining.

‘Did you see anyone at the station?’ asked the girl, as she attended to Opal’s wants.

‘No one got out but myself,’ replied Opal, looking at the bright face, and deciding that it was the prettiest she had ever seen out of the looking-glass.

‘Jack must have missed his train.’

Opal brightened invisibly. There was something refreshing to her in the mention of a Jack. She forgot that he might be a schoolboy. Just then she caught sight of a photograph on one of the little tables. It was a likeness of the young man she had met in the train. Could he be Jack? This was like the beginning of a romance.

‘Isn’t that good of Greta—my daugh-

ter?' asked Mrs. Daman, seeing Opal's eyes fixed.

'Yes, but it hardly does justice,' replied Opal, perceiving for the first time that the girl's likeness stood beside that of the young man. She longed to ask, 'Is that your son?' but caution was a habit with her.

'Where is Bowwow?' said Mrs. Daman, looking round.

Opal looked round too, instinctively drawing her dress about her feet.

There was a gentle rustling of the curtain which covered the bow-window, and out came a little girl with a complexion like apple-blossom and hair like silkworms' freshly-spun silk, who looked almost too babyish to be Opal's pupil. She came forward shyly offering one hand, whilst the other kept tight hold of a book. Bowwow's shyness did not last long, for Opal had a happy manner with children: it was part of her stock-in-trade.

‘You’ll find her quite up to her years in everything but looks,’ said the mother; ‘but we don’t want you to press her on too fast; she’s so quick, she oughtn’t to be allowed to learn much yet.’

Opal had heard this from parents before, and attached very little importance to it. But Greta broke in, impatiently,

‘Nonsense, mother, as if she wouldn’t work her brains just as much whether she was taught or not. Do let us have one scholar in the family. I never ran to book-learning, or Jack either. But you can’t keep this child away from books. She may as well puzzle her brains over history and geography as over—“Monte Cristo,”’ she cried, catching the book out of the child’s hand.

‘Jack gave it me,’ said Bowwow, with a look of defiance at the new governess.

Opal avoided the question of Dumas’s fitness for her pupil’s study by remarking, as she saw a name written on the cover of

the book, 'Blanche, is that your pretty name? And why are you called Bowwow?'

'I'd much rather be called Blanche; do call me Blanche,' said the child, eagerly. She had been staring at Opal with the steady effrontery of childhood, and added, as the result of her inspection, 'I shall like you better than the gorilla.'

Opal looked round for an explanation, but Mrs. Daman had closed her eyes, and Greta was looking out, with her face pressed against the window.

'My last governess,' explained Bowwow. 'Jack said she was like a gorilla. Jack likes pretty people,' she added, as if this showed rather an unusual taste on his part; 'they made the governesses send their photos this time, and yours was the prettiest of all. That's Jack,' she added, taking the picture off the table. Then with a sudden impulse of hospitality she asked, 'Don't you want to take off your things?'

Opal caught at the suggestion. She was

longing to make herself presentable before Jack came home.

Greta followed them upstairs.

‘Have you got everything you want?’ she asked, as she turned up the gas and poked the fire into a blaze. ‘I must go and dress, Jack and I are going to a ball.’

‘A ball?’ exclaimed Opal, ‘do you have many?’

‘Not so many as I should like. This doesn’t look much of a place for balls—does it? We have to go eight miles for this one. Come, Bowwow, you’ll only be in Miss Carew’s way.’

‘Oh no, let her stay if she likes.’

Opal had no secrets of the toilet. The silky black plaits which she coiled round her head were all her own and she was rather glad to exhibit them even to Bowwow.

‘Oh, what long hair,’ exclaimed the child. ‘Greta’s hair isn’t long like that. But isn’t Greta pretty?’

‘Yes, I never saw anyone prettier,’ re-

plied Opal, with enthusiasm. She knew that little children chattered. 'What a lovely colour she has. I've heard people talk of the Devonshire complexion, but I never realised what it was till I saw Miss Daman.'

'Miss Daman,' said Bowwow, with a little soft crowing laugh. 'Greta isn't Miss Daman. Her name's Charlstrom; she's only my half-sister, you know. And Jack's my half-brother.'

'Then your brother's name is Charlstrom too?'

'Oh no, Jack's name's Daman. He's my father's son and Greta's my mother's daughter and I'm both their child.' Bowwow paused as if trying to amend her last expression, whilst Opal remarked,

'Well, I don't think your relations could be more complicated, considering there are only three of you.'

'Isn't it funny?' said Bowwow. 'Father calls us mine, thine, and ours. Oh, are you

going to wear that?' as Opal took a cream-coloured nun's-cloth out of her box.

'No, that's my best dress,' said Opal, wishing that she could put it on and go to the ball.

She put on a brown velveteen, which she knew became her, though it had seen service.

'That pretty girl will be in full dress; I must not look like Cinderella beside her,' she thought.

The evening was the time when Opal appeared to most advantage. Seen by artificial light her sallow complexion looked clear and waxen, her grey eyes darkened and seemed to light up. But there was no play of feature like that which gave charm to Greta Charlstrom's face. In spite of Opal's regular features and well modelled figure, people differed as to her claims to beauty. But no one ever wished Greta to be in any respect different from what she was. Even Opal, who considerably over-

rated her own attractions, recognised in this girl something worse than a rival beauty. She examined her critically when they met again in the drawing-room.

Greta was tall and rather square-shouldered, but the general effect of her figure was easy and graceful. There was an appearance of health and vigour about her which was attractive, since it did not degenerate into coarseness. No one could quite say where the spell lay which set Greta above her fellows; she had some gift which can never be acquired, something which distinguished her from the common herd of pretty girls, and made them look dowdy and insignificant beside her. Her dress usually set off her beauty, without attracting attention in itself. This evening she wore a creamy dress of some soft, silky material, cut after the fashion with which Kate Greenaway's pictures have made us familiar, and trimmed with a bright shade of brown. Tan shoes and

gloves gave effect to the costume, and the girl's clear brown eyes, and light brown hair seemed to complete the harmony. Opal debated with herself as to whether Greta would be called fair or dark. Better than either, was her unwilling conclusion.

A noise at the hall-door sent Greta flying out of the room, and made Opal look eagerly for Jack. But the brisk little man who came in, stamping his feet and shaking the rain off his coat, had little in common with the good-looking young man whom she had met on her way.

'Jack!' exclaimed Mr. Daman, as he came in. 'No, I haven't seen him all day. Didn't he go shooting with Tom Oliver? We needn't wait dinner for him.'

'Oh, never mind dinner,' cried Greta; 'it's my ball I'm thinking of. You'll have to take me, if Jack isn't back in time. Oh! there he is,' she exclaimed, running away at a fresh sound.

From her corner by the fire, Opal could

not see the new-comer, but she heard an exclamation.

‘Oh, you dear boy! Just the very thing I wanted.’

Then Greta hurried Jack off to dress, and disappeared herself for a few moments. When she came down, her dress had gained a touch of colour. A spray of maple leaves, wearing their brightest tints, was trailed across her bodice, a small cluster nestled in her hair.

‘We mustn’t scold Jack; he went everywhere to get me these leaves,’ she remarked. ‘I’d forgotten I said anything about them.’

Dinner was half-over before Jack made his appearance, and Greta quickly hurried him away, as the carriage was waiting. Opal wondered whether it was the same vehicle which had brought her from the station, if so, she did not wonder at Greta’s impatience to start. She found her own evening rather dull, and was glad to go up early to her room. She spent some

time in unpacking and putting away her things. Opal was old-maidishly tidy, and it gave her real satisfaction to find a hanging wardrobe, and a good supply of drawers. It was nearly twelve o'clock before she was ready to get into bed. As she extinguished her candle, the room was full of moonlight. Opal drew aside the blind. Just opposite her window rose the grey tower of a church, below it she saw the white gleam of tombstones. Dropping the blind hastily, Opal crept into bed, with a shiver.

CHAPTER II.

‘Do you like hearing about it, or does it only make your mouth water?’ asked Greta, suddenly stopping short in the midst of a lively account of her ball.

‘Oh, I like it,’ replied Opal, who was her only companion at the breakfast-table. ‘I’m used to getting my amusement at second-hand. It’s better than nothing.’

‘I’m afraid I shouldn’t think so. I should like to go to a ball every night.’

‘You wouldn’t enjoy it so much, if you did.’

‘Oh, yes, I should ; I never get knocked up as some girls do. And I shouldn’t want to keep on at it for ever: I think

everyone ought to give up dancing by five-and-twenty, don't you ?'

'Well, you see, I'm two-and-twenty already, and I've been to about three balls. I think I should like a little more grace.'

'You don't look two-and-twenty,' said Greta, evidently intending a compliment.

'Oh, but I wish I did. No one wants a governess to look a mere girl.'

'We do. It's horrid to have a prim, middle-aged woman set down in the midst of your family. You don't look a bit older than I do, though I'm only eighteen. People always take me for older. I used to get plenty of partners when I was only fifteen, and they treated me just like a grown-up girl.'

'But you were not out at fifteen ?'

'I don't think I was ever in. Jack and I used to go everywhere when we got the chance. Oh, mother'—as Mrs. Daman came in—'do you know anything of a Mrs. Randall? She claimed acquaintance with

me and asked if I wasn't related to General Charlstrom.'

'Of course you said you were his niece.'

'Great-niece, isn't it? I told her I hadn't seen him in my life, and didn't want to. Don't look horrified, I didn't use those very words. I said I knew nothing about my father's people, and I didn't believe in blood for my step-father was quite as much to me as any real father could be.'

'Such a common little man. How can she?' thought Opal, who found a good deal wanting in Mr. Daman's outer man.

'I know she only thought the grapes were sour,' said Greta, 'no one ever will believe that I don't want the Charlstroms a bit more than they want me.'

'I wish they could see you, all the same,' replied her mother. 'They couldn't deny that you were a Charlstrom all over—in looks, I mean,' she added, with an emphasis which was scarcely flattering to the other

qualities of her first husband's family. 'I wonder what your cousins are like.'

Opal felt sure that Mrs. Daman was thinking that the cousins could not but appear to a disadvantage beside her own child. She had not passed an evening in Mrs. Daman's company without hearing something of Greta's perfection.

'Mrs. Randall can tell you all about them,' said Greta, eagerly, 'she wants us to go over to Plymouth and see her. She asked to be introduced to you last night, but I told her you never went anywhere. I think she was rather shocked to find I had no chaperon but Jack.'

'I don't know about calling on her myself. You can go.'

'Oh, mother, backing out of it as usual,' cried Greta.

It was no personal distaste for society which made Mrs. Daman 'back out' of things. She had been fond of gaiety, and might have liked it still, but she felt her-

self rather heavily weighted by the fact that her husband kept a shop in Plymouth. As the wife of Captain Charlstrom she had been poor and uncomfortable, but she had suffered no misgivings as to her social standing. It was not only that her husband belonged to a good corps, or that he boasted himself to be somebody (presuming perhaps on the fact that few people had the pedigree of a Swedish family at their finger ends). There was something in the man's presence which made him need no hall-mark to pass for genuine. His wife had been very proud of him, but her pride was the only thing satisfied in her first married life. No one but herself could fully realise how little Captain Charlstrom cared for anyone's comfort but his own. He had no vices, commonly so called, but a vice occasionally indulged might have been almost easier to bear than the daily contact with his hard egotism. Even the one instinct which often prevails over a

selfish nature was wanting. He had as little consideration for his child as for his wife. And, when his death left them almost unprovided for, his family had shown little regard for them either. Yet nothing hurt Mrs. Daman so much as the fact that they had dropped even the semblance of civility when she married the 'common little man' who was only a wine-merchant in Plymouth.

Life is very like a see-saw, now up, now down : a few, but only a few, seem to remain always at one end of the swing. It was in keeping with the common laws of compensation that Mrs. Daman should now find herself the happiest and most petted of wives, whilst Greta was only in danger of being spoiled by a step-father who, if he came nothing behind a real parent in affection, was perhaps somewhat remiss in the exercise of a parent's authority. Mrs. Daman's home life was so smooth that she never thought of wishing it altered till Greta began to grow up. Then a

longing to show her beautiful daughter and to see her admired came over the mother. But her best chance of pushing Greta into society was by effacing herself. A pretty girl is always in some demand. When she brings a partner with her, the only objection to her presence at a dance is removed. Greta and Jack were making a little popularity for themselves, no one caring much who the parents of such presentable young people might be.

Mrs. Daman was too busy with speculations as to whether Mrs. Randall might introduce Greta to the notice of her father's relations to think about her new governess. But Opal did not wait to be reminded that ten o'clock was the hour fixed for Bow-wow's lessons. She slipped away and called her pupil in from the garden just as Jack came down to breakfast. Opal wondered whether he was accustomed to spend his mornings in bed. His father had gone off to Plymouth hours before; but the son

did not seem to follow any occupation. Jack had no need to work, being the one rich member of the family; but this was part of the family history which Opal had yet to learn. She meant to get information out of Bowwow by-and-by, but at present it was her duty to give instruction.

Very steadily both teacher and pupil applied themselves to the business in hand. Only once, as the sound of horses' hoofs was heard on the gravel, did Bowwow interrupt her reading to remark that Greta and Jack were going for a ride. But she did not ask leave to jump down and see them, as most children would have done. The Advancement of Learning had a real charm for Bowwow, and Nature had made its acquirement easy to her.

But the bow of Apollo is sometimes unbent, and Greta, looking into the school-room on her return, found the child curled up at her governess's feet pretending, as Opal explained, to be her dog.

‘Her favourite game, hence her name,’ said Greta. ‘Don’t you think it’s about time she put away such childish things? And dogs don’t read books,’ she added, seeing ‘Monte Cristo’ held firmly in what should have been a paw.

‘Then I’m sure she might be a dog herself, for she never reads,’ said Bowwow, who felt her illusions cruelly shattered. But Greta was out of hearing, the child’s little gun having been fired rather late.

Opal replied by a little dissertation on the pleasures of reading, a taste which she shared with her pupil. It was characteristic of her to fall in with Bowwow’s fancy for being talked to like a grown-up person. When Bowwow was not a mere baby, she was very grown-up indeed, leaping over all intermediate years, and becoming an old woman at once in her endeavour to seem a young one. Her nick-name was a sore offence to her dignity, for she was secretly ashamed of the childish instincts

which would occasionally assert themselves.

‘You’ll always call me Blanche, won’t you?’ she said, when Opal had for once forgotten. ‘What’s your name? We used to try to guess, but you only put “O. Carew” to your letters.’

‘Try again, though no one ever guessed my name yet.’

Neither did Bowwow. At last she rushed out, and caught Jack, dragging him into the school-room.

‘Come and help me guess Miss Carew’s name,’ she cried. ‘It begins with an “O,” but it isn’t Olivia, or Olive, or Orpah, or Ophelia.’

‘Octavia,—Miss Carew—is an eighth daughter,’ said Jack.

‘I am all the daughters of my father’s house, and all the brothers too,’ replied Opal.

Jack perceived that she must be making a quotation, but he did not recognise it,

and even Bowwow was not acquainted with Shakespeare.

‘Perhaps it’s Orchid?’ guessed Jack. ‘I never heard of such a name, but I think Miss Carew looks like an orchid.’

‘Is that meant for a compliment?’ asked Opal. ‘I have seen some orchids which I should be very sorry to resemble.’

‘They’re like insects sometimes,’ cried Bowwow.

Jack was young, and had not acquired the art of turning a compliment gracefully. He was making a bungling attempt to defend his proposition, when Greta came in, and cut across his speech, after the fashion of the family, who never gave much heed to the speaker’s privileges.

‘Orchids! I call them snobbish flowers. People think much of them, because they represent a lot of money.’

‘Then I wish I did resemble them,’ said Opal, in a low voice.

The gong sounded, and Bowwow seized her governess' arm.

'I'm going to take Miss Carew in to lunch. Go away, Jack, she's not your friend, she's mine.'

'But I met her first. Perhaps you didn't notice me, Miss Carew, but I travelled part of the way with you yesterday?'

Opal considered him for a moment.

'I suppose you're the young man who jumped in when the train was going at full speed?'

'I'm sure he was,' said Greta. 'He always misses his train, except when he catches it half-way out of the station. You'll be fined some day, Jack, if you don't come to a bad end.'

'A bad end suggests an end at the hands of the law,' remarked Jack. 'I believe a gipsy did once promise me something of the sort.'

'I thought gipsies always prophesied

smooth things,' said Opal. 'When I had my fortune told, I was promised my heart's desire.'

'What is your heart's desire?' asked Bowwow.

Opal did not answer, but Greta broke in, 'Mine is to have plenty of fun whilst I'm young, and Bowwow's is to be grown up.'

'And mine is to come of age,' said Jack.

'Then I should think yours was in a fair way to be fulfilled,' remarked Opal. 'A year, a month, and a week exactly.'

'We're going to give a ball when Jack comes of age,' said Greta.

'But that is not the whole aim and end of my desires,' replied Jack, with a look which Opal could not quite understand.

She had discovered by a sort of free-masonry that the young man was a flirt, but she thought it odd that he should care to flirt with Greta, who was like a sister to him. Especially when a girl who did

not labour under the same disadvantage was present. It was in the natural order of things that Jack should find a new-comer more attractive than anyone he had known all his life, but Opal wondered how Greta would like to find herself making a bad third. It was a case which craved wary walking, but Opal felt herself quite equal to the part.

Luncheon was soon despatched, the young people who ruled the house being too full of animal spirits to sit long over anything. Greta was the first to spring from the table.

‘Let’s go for a walk ; you must long to get out, Miss Carew, after being kept in all the morning.’

Fresh air and exercise were necessities of life to Greta, and she was young enough to judge everyone’s tastes by her own. Opal never wanted to walk for the sake of walking. Anything was better than being sent out with Bowwow, but she

would much rather have sat over the fire if the others would have sat with her. It was a dull afternoon; there had been neither sun nor wind to dry the roads, and Opal was not properly equipped for country walking. She could never bring herself to spoil her dresses by having them cut to a convenient walking length, and the sight of Greta's thick, country-made boots gave her a shudder. Yet, as she gathered up her draggled skirts and took short, quick steps to keep pace with the brisk stride of the others, she was conscious of appearing to a disadvantage.

The walk gave her no sense of exhilaration. Born in the tropics, a fact which, for reasons of her own, she concealed, Opal had none of the English vigour which distinguished her companions. Even Bowwow could have walked her governess off her legs with ease. But it never occurred to the young people that any girl could find the walk too long or the pace

too severe. Greta, who was always the leader, had fixed the goal of their walk at what she called 'the old house.'

Careyscombe, to give the place its rightful name, was a deserted house which was falling into decay without gaining any of the grace or beauty of a ruin. There was nothing picturesque about broken windows or walls to which strips of paper yet clung. To Opal the place brought a sense of desolation. She felt a dim reflection of the nameless horror which had come over her the day before on the threshold of the Glebe House. And again the feeling was coupled with physical fear as she caught sight of cattle grazing close to the windows, through which her companions were proposing to effect an entrance. They had approached the house in a somewhat lawless manner by scrambling through a hedge and over a fence.

'We often come,' had been Greta's reply to a slight remonstrance from Opal, who

secretly debated what dearth of amusement could bring people to such a place. As they entered the large room, which still bore some traces of grandeur in its carved chimney-piece and wide hearth, Opal wished that there had been tenants to offer easy chairs and afternoon tea. Some such idea passed through Greta's mind as she slid down the long floor.

‘What a pity no one lives here now. Think what balls they would give.’

‘They wouldn't ask us if they did,’ replied Jack.

‘Oh, yes, they would, when they found how nice we were.’

Opal felt like a tired horse eager to get back to its stable, but her companions would not let her go till she had explored every bit of the house, which they considered safe, their views on that subject differing widely from her own. In vain she protested, ostensibly on Bowwow's account. Bowwow was fearless: and sure-

footed, and did not at all like to be thought incapable of doing what the others did. Besides, the old house had an especial charm for her. There was an air of mystery about it very dear to the heart of an imaginative child. She was always expecting to find a secret passage or some mysterious vault with a hidden treasure. There was one little room in very excellent preservation, which suggested great possibilities. Greta maintained that it was only a store room, and Jack professed himself disappointed at finding no jam pots, but Opal affected to fall-in with her pupil's mood, and declared that there must be a sliding-panel or trap-door somewhere.

‘And I’m sure there must be a ghost,’ she added, ‘such a place as this is made to be haunted.’

‘Oh, do you really believe in ghosts?’ asked Bowwow, so eagerly that Opal, who believed more than she cared to own, felt that she had been indiscreet.

‘Miss Carew keeps a lot of tame ghosts, she makes pets of them,’ said Jack, creating a sudden diversion by shutting Bow-wow into the little room and pretending to fasten the door, while he spoke aside to Opal.

‘Such a nervous, fanciful little monkey, we don’t want her to get ideas into her head. They talk some such nonsense about the Glebe House,’ he added, as he suddenly opened the door and chased Bowwow out with a most unghostly roar.

Opal stood transfixed. So the Glebe House was haunted, and that was the meaning of her mysterious tremors and vague horror. And this dismal place was no doubt haunted too.

‘We must go and see Mrs. Mol, now we have got so far.’

‘Miss Carew is tired,’ objected Bow-wow, who was the most observant of the party.

‘But her money is due,’ replied Greta,

disposing of Opal's speculations as to whether Mrs. Mol might be a person worth visiting, 'you had better take it, Jack, whilst we walk on. Don't let me walk too fast for you,' she said, checking her pace as she fell back to join Opal, whilst Bow-wow ran after her brother.

The two girls climbed slowly out of the hollow in which the deserted house stood, Greta turning back every now and then to catch some new aspect of the place, which seemed to have an unaccountable attraction for her. The weather had cleared, and the scene was looking very different now from what it had looked at their approach. But it was still dreary and uninteresting to Opal, who in truth preferred a street with shops to the finest view in the world. She wondered at the interest with which Greta watched the changing sky and the shifting lights on the landscape, at her eagerness to point out the autumn tinted leaves and the bright green ferns

growing under the hedges. Opal cared for none of these things. She picked a bunch of red berries with a view to adorning her brown dress in the evening, and felt in duty bound to admire the lane through which their way led. The phrase 'Devonshire lane' recurring to her mind, suggested that it was probably one of the points on which natives prided themselves.

'They call Kent the Garden of England,' she remarked, 'but I should think Devonshire was more like it.'

'There's no county to compare with it,' cried Greta; 'not that I've seen many others.'

'Have you ever been abroad?'

'No, but Jack and I mean to go everywhere when we're married.'

Opal almost gasped with astonishment.

'Are you going to marry'—your brother, she had almost said—'Mr. Daman?'

'Yes; it seems to surprise you.'

'I took you for brother and sister.'

‘But we are not in the least related.’

‘Only you must know each other so well.’

‘So we do. Don’t you think that’s a good reason for being married?’

‘Of course it is, really. But I should like something new when I married; new relations and all.’

‘Oh, I should hate that. It always seems so unnatural to me for a girl to leave her own people and go away with a stranger. I couldn’t marry anyone but Jack.’

‘I never had any people of my own, so perhaps I can’t judge.’

‘Oh, you poor girl, I do pity you.’

Opal did not like to be pitied. She thought that pity ought to be reserved for the old and ugly.

‘I couldn’t fall in love with a man who’d been brought up with me like a brother.’

‘But Jack wasn’t brought up with me.

He lived with his grandfather till he was sixteen.'

'Oh, that alters the case entirely.'

'But we knew each other very well. Mr. Burrows couldn't keep Jack quite away from his own father, though he would have liked to.'

'Was Mr. Burrows his mother's father?'

'Yes, but he was not a nice old man. I can't help saying so, though he's dead. And I don't think Jack's mother can have been very nice either. She ran away with her husband. Well, I don't blame her so much for that; but she ran home again after a year or two and took her child with her. That was how Mr. Burrows came to keep Jack.'

'Was he very fond of him?'

'Oh, yes, he was kind enough to Jack, but he was very nasty to his father. I think rich people often are nasty, at least all the nicest people I've known have been poor.'

Opal wondered how the old gentleman had disposed of his wealth.

‘I wonder he did not throw over his daughter altogether if he disliked her marriage so,’ she observed.

‘He did at first, but he was obliged to give in because she was his only child. He had always wanted a son, and that made him take to Jack.’

‘Are you going to be married soon?’

‘Not till Jack comes of age. We have always been engaged, but we don’t tell everyone. It’s no use advertising ourselves. Engaged people are thought so stupid.’

‘Engaged people *are* stupid,’ thought Opal; ‘and it’s like my luck to be shut up in this dreary hole with a pair of them.’

CHAPTER III.

OPAL'S first day at Avonuish was a sample of many which followed. Sitting in the school-room with Bowwow she heard the clatter of horses' hoofs or the thud of tennis balls, and wondered why she should work whilst Greta played. Opal had no active desire that other people should be less comfortable. She would by choice have lived in a world where play was the rule. But she meant at any price to enrol herself in the ranks of the non-workers. Marriage offered the natural means of deliverance from drudgery, it was the end which she kept steadily in view. Though her designs on Jack had received an early check, Opal had no intention of relinquishing them

since she had gathered that the prize was worth winning. An engagement, she told herself, need offer no insurmountable obstacle, since engagements were often broken. The constant intercourse which the young people enjoyed, left little opening for inconstancy, but it gave great opportunities for quarrelling. And the lovers quarrelled more than seemed necessary for the renewing of love. Greta was a somewhat imperious mistress, who used her power recklessly, having evidently no fear of losing her lover. Her good temper, which was by no means associated with a meek spirit, gave her a great advantage over Jack, who was hasty, jealous, and exacting. Opal watched and waited, believing that she saw materials for mischief lying ready for the working of a skilful hand. In the meantime she seemed only anxious to keep out of the way of the lovers, and apparently deprecated the politeness which induced them to remember her existence.

Against any suggestion of curtailing their walks, for instance, she protested—officially. Yet she contrived to obtain relief without unpopularity. No one could call her a marplot because Bowwow rebelled at being left miles behind with her governess. Opal knew that Mrs. Daman would give heed to the child's complaint. Unlimited indulgence had produced a charming result in the education of Greta, and the mother was glad to follow out so easy a system. She liked her children to do as they pleased, only asking to see cheerful faces. Her desire to make people comfortable in their own way extended beyond the limits of her family.

As soon as her governess showed an indisposition to walk, Mrs. Daman, who never walked herself if she could help it, proposed to keep her at home. Under the impression that Opal was delicate, she petted and coddled her as she had never been able to coddle her own hardy children. She pre-

scribed Devonshire cream, and other agreeable medicines, whilst Mr. Daman, who was naturally a sworn foe to the Blue Ribbon order, plied his wife's patient with dry champagne and with ports, which are generally held to be above the range of female intellect.

It was easy for Opal to recommend herself to Mrs. Daman. The mother got little companionship from her own young people, who were out all day long. When the evenings grew too dark for lawn-tennis, they took to playing billiards in an out-building where they had set up a table. Mrs. Daman would sometimes regret that the chief home resources of youth were closed to her own boy and girl, since Jack never opened a book and Greta never touched a needle. Yet their time did not seem to hang heavily. Love-making and lovers' light quarrels served to fill up the intervals of active amusement and supplied a zest to the daily routine. A book had

not the terrors for Greta that it had for her lover, but she displayed the restlessness of a lively child, and had never concentrated her mind on anything. Jack had always been her most congenial companion, and Jack cared for nothing but the use of his active limbs, and of a pronounced talent for philandering. The lips that he loved were always near, and a gun, a rod, or the chance of a run alone had power to draw him away from them. All such amusements were held in abhorrence by Greta. She had once been induced to follow the hounds, but had soon turned back and dragged Jack with her in a fit of horror at the sufferings of the fox. Greta's tenderness for animals amounted, as Jack said, to a mania. She was always engaged in a crusade against gamekeepers for trapping or shooting the poaching animal tribe. In the spring it was bird-nesting which called forth her protests. If she had lived more in the world, Greta would have been fore-

most amongst the opponents of vivisection, but she knew nothing of public affairs and never looked at any paper without pictures.

The days when Jack went shooting were dull ones for a girl who had never learnt to amuse herself, but Opal's company proved a resource. Opal had one gift which unluckily for herself possessed no recognised marketable value. She could talk well, though she was not a great talker. The spell of her conversation drew Greta to join her mother's circle round the fire. Opal had lived on the outskirts of that society after which Mrs. Daman and her daughter cherished secret longings. From the school-room of a great house she had heard echoes and seen reflections which she now reproduced. She could speak familiarly of people whose names and whose entertainments figured in the *Queen*, the one chronicle of fashion which made its way to the Glebe House. For her auditors, Opal's

talk had the interest of a three-volume novel and the flavour of a society paper. Perhaps it bore an equivalent relation to fact, but Mrs Daman and Greta never doubted that they were listening to history. Opal had taken no part in the gay scenes which she described, distance had lent enchantment to her view, and she laid the colours on her picture with artistic skill.

‘What happy lives some girls lead,’ exclaimed Greta, as she sat on the hearth-rug with arms clasped round her knees and eyes fastened on Opal as if she had been a favourite preacher.

Greta’s own life was as happy as youth, and health, and love could make it, but there was something to be wished for just out of reach.

Mrs. Daman looked regretfully at her daughter.

‘I wish Mrs Randall would take you out a little. She might as well, she goes everywhere and she has no daughters.’

‘She has sons,’ said Opal.

‘I shouldn’t hurt her sons, and I’m sure I don’t want them,’ cried Greta.

‘No, you’ve done better. Why don’t you tell her you’re engaged?’ asked Opal.

‘She’d tell everyone, and I don’t want to be tied up before my time.’

Then Greta jumped up suddenly.

‘Let’s go over and look Mrs. Randall up, Opal, we haven’t been for a long time. She’s always very nice, even if she doesn’t want me for a daughter-in-law.’

A visit to Plymouth made one of the few agreeable breaks in Opal’s life.

There were always shops and people walking about to be seen there, sights which were not to be found in Avonuish. And Mr. Daman was delighted to receive them at his shop, as Greta insisted on calling it, and to spread a banquet before them in the shape of afternoon tea. Opal had been pleased when Greta first took her to call on Mrs. Randall. But, though too well

bred to snub a governess, Mrs. Randall showed pretty plainly that she wished Greta would not bring her friend.

She had taken up Greta on a good-natured impulse, meaning to introduce her to her unknown relations if she got a chance. But Opal was right in supposing that she did not care to have Greta about when her boys, as she called them, were at home. Mrs. Randall regarded Mr. Daman's step-daughter as an impossible match for one of her own sons. But her gracious manner disguised any ungracious thoughts from Greta, who was perhaps provoked into responding warmly to the new friendship offered her, by the fact that Jack had set his face against Mrs. Randall. He had an unreasoning jealousy of anyone connected with Greta's own family, and Mrs. Randall evidently attached importance to the circumstance of her being a Charlstrom.

With a secret hope that they might find

Mrs. Randall 'not at home,' Opal accompanied Greta to Plymouth. The lady was in—a sure sign, Opal thought, that the boys were out. Mrs. Randall pressed the girls to stay, and gave them tea out of egg-shell china, and delicate rolls of bread and butter, which were perhaps a poor substitute for the larger hospitality which they would have received in George Street.

'What dreadful news this is about your poor cousin!' said Mrs. Randall, addressing Greta.

'What cousin? I've not heard any news,' replied Greta.

'I thought you must have seen it in the paper. Poor Edith Charlstrom,—thrown from her horse and killed on the spot. I never heard anything so shocking. Such a pretty girl, and just going to be married. I told you of her engagement to Captain Mace, didn't I? They were all so pleased at it. A son of the new judge, you know.'

Greta knew nothing of Her Majesty's

judges, either new or old, but her mind fastened at once on the romantic side of the story.

‘Poor fellow! how dreadful for him!’ she exclaimed.

Greta hated hearing of painful things. She wished that Mrs. Randall would not insist on finding the newspaper, and making her read a paragraph which was headed :

‘FATAL ACCIDENT TO A LADY.—An inquest was held yesterday at Lancaster Gate on the body of Miss Edith Charlstrom, daughter of Major-General Sir Peter Charlstrom, K.C.B. Miss Charlstrom, who was only twenty-four years of age, was riding on Friday morning in Hyde Park, when, just opposite Grosvenor Gate, her horse stumbled. Miss Charlstrom was thrown on her head, and appears to have been killed instantaneously. The horse which she was riding had been used by her for two years without accident, and is sup-

posed to have fallen through crossing his feet.'

'I wish she hadn't told us—it quite spoilt our visit,' remarked Greta, when she left the house. 'I shan't tell mother; it might make her nervous when Jack and I went riding. We've never given you that riding-lesson we talked of, have we?'

Opal thought that this was a most unpropitious moment to talk to her of riding.

'I don't want to get tastes above my station,' she replied. 'If I knew how to ride, I should only hanker after a horse. And I shan't always live with you, I'm afraid.'

'Oh, but I hope you will for a long time. When Jack and I are married, we shall be away a great deal, and it would be so nice for mother to have you. Only, of course, you may get married yourself,' added Greta, as a polite afterthought.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. DAMAN did not ask the girls many questions about their visit. She was sitting with an open letter in her hand and a disturbed expression of face.

‘It’s from Aunt Sophy, Greta ; she wants you to go and stay with her at Bourne-mouth.’

‘How horrid ! I can’t go, I should hate it,’ cried Greta, in a breath.

‘It would be dull for you, certainly.’

‘It would kill me,’ observed Greta, who expressed herself strongly. ‘Just think, Opal, Aunt Sophy is the greatest fidge you ever knew. She’s so dreadfully afraid of cold that she makes her rooms red-hot and

sits with all the doors and windows shut. And she lays down the law and sets everyone right on every subject under the sun. She's mother's sister, and we're awfully polite to her for mother's sake, but we tear our hair when she comes to see us, and we can scarcely conceal our indecent exultation when she goes away.'

'She's very good and kind, and you liked her well enough till Jack set you against her,' said Mrs. Daman, who made very creditable efforts to maintain a sisterly feeling against the influence of those bound to her by still closer ties.

'It isn't good and kind to pick holes in everyone, and to care for nothing but your own things,' cried Greta. 'Aunt Sophy thinks a great deal more of her new cap than she does of my going to be married. Well'—suddenly softening—'I'm very sorry for the poor old thing, it must be horrid to live alone with no one to care for you.'

And I think she was rather kind to me when I was little. But I can't go and stop with her, I'm not good enough to sacrifice myself, that's the truth.'

'I must write and make some excuse. What can I say?'

'Say you can't spare me. Aunt Sophy's always throwing out at me for being useless, she'll think I'm mending my ways. Is there anything else in her letter that you're hiding it. Oh, mother, we needn't have any secrets from Opal.'

Opal spared Mrs. Daman the difficulty of a reply by going out at once. But she lingered amongst the flowers and foliage plants in the hall, picking off dead leaves, and catching fragments at least of the conversation in the drawing-room.

'It's about Opal, and it bothers me. Read it yourself,' said Mrs. Daman, 'out loud,' she added, laying her finger on the passage.

'Oh, what a shame, I don't believe a

word of it,' cried Greta, running her eye down the page before she began to read aloud :

‘ “ And now, my dear sister, I want to speak to you very seriously. You tell me that you have got a young lady named Opal Carew for your governess. Now I happen to know that she is not at all a fit person for you to have in your house. Emily Harrison (niece to Mrs. Gibson who was Mary Carpenter, you know) went to school with her in Brussels. It was a school kept by an English lady, Mrs. Vernon Smith. Mr. Harrison, who was very particular, would not have sent his daughter to a foreign school unless he had been assured of the strict moral tone and high character of the establishment. Well, to make a long story short, Miss Opal Carew was expelled for misconduct (something very bad about a young man, my dear—I can’t tell you the whole in a letter). She was a horrid girl besides, and had a most

dreadful temper. She was born in the East Indies or the West Indies, I forget which, and her mother was what they call a Chee-chee (I don't know what that means, but I believe it's something black). Of course you will get rid of her at once, and it happens most fortunately that I can supply you with the very person to fill her place. Miss Withers is a clergyman's daughter, and her mother was a Vivian, niece to the Bishop of Brisbane, whose——"

'Oh, bother her pedigrees, tedious old thing,' cried Greta, flinging the letter into the grate. 'It's all a plot to get our place for this bishop's cousin. It can't be our Opal at all. A black mother! A dreadful temper! Mother, you don't believe it! Such a good, demure little thing, too. The very last girl to carry on games with a young man at a boarding-school.'

At this moment Opal entered, hesitating a little as she stood just within the door. She saw Greta's indignant face, she saw

Mrs. Daman smoothing out the singed letter. But this seemed scarcely enough to account for her being so well prepared for the questions which Greta put to her.

‘Were you ever at school in Brussels?’

‘No,’ with a slight air of surprise. ‘I was at school at Lausanne.’

Greta looked triumphantly at her mother.

‘Do you think there can be another Opal Carew in the world?’

‘I don’t suppose there is now; I had a cousin with the same name, but she died.’

‘Then that must be the girl,’ cried Greta. ‘Did she go to school at Brussels, and did she get expelled, and had she a dreadful temper, and was her mother a Cheechee?’

‘I knew very little about her,’ said Opal; ‘but I did hear of her getting into some trouble at school, and, I believe, it was in Brussels.’

‘And Aunt Sophy has been trying to make out it was you,’ exclaimed Greta.

‘The description did not at all fit in

with what we knew of you,' said Mrs. Daman, kindly. 'Let's burn the letter, and say no more about it. Not even to Jack,' she added, looking at Greta. 'He would only think poor Aunt Sophy ill-natured.'

'He thinks that already. Oh, I must tell Jack: it will make him so angry.'

'But that's the very reason for not telling him,' urged Mrs. Daman.

'I'm afraid my poor cousin wasn't a very nice girl, but it seems hard to have things raked up against her now she's dead,' remarked Opal. 'My uncle wouldn't like it either, and I owe him something, for he had me educated.'

This plea had some weight with Greta. Before Jack came home she had promised never to say anything about the scandal; and a letter had been sent to Aunt Sophy, which was inspired, if not dictated, by the person most interested in her story.

Before she slept that night, Opal pleaded

her own cause before herself, and made out a good case for the defence. Since she might some day be found out, she thought it well to be prepared. Report had a good deal exaggerated her misconduct, and she had grounds for believing herself to have been harshly, and even unfairly, dealt with. She had not been the only girl to exchange love-letters, or to meet a lover on the sly, at Mrs. Vernon Smith's 'strict' *pensionnat*. But she had been made the scapegoat, because she was poor and of no account. No excuse had been found for her in the fact that she was very young, and had meant no harm. She had only wanted to get married instead of going out as a governess. In those days she had supposed that love-making always meant matrimony. Opal's severe punishment had left a stain on her character which was certainly undeserved. It had given her uncle an excuse for withdrawing his appearance of friendship. Though he did his best to suppress any

rumours which might interfere with her bread-winning, he never put the slightest confidence in her again.

Banished to an inferior school in Lausanne, Opal repented after a fashion, and her character changed outwardly, at least, for the better. She was never again guilty of indiscretion. She learned to control the violent temper which had made her so much disliked that no one stood by her in her disgrace. She found that it paid better to cultivate the smooth manner and plausible insincerity which came to her as an inheritance from her mother the 'Cheechee.' With no one to care for her, Opal grew into the habit of considering no interests but her own. Yet she seemed good-natured, and her good-nature was partly genuine. Some of the virtues which she assumed were almost real, and her taste usually inclined towards good rather than evil where no sacrifice was involved. She told falsehoods instinctively, using them as she would any

other weapons of defence. But she had not often told so blunt a lie as to-day, and it disturbed her, chiefly because she might be brought face to face with Aunt Sophy or even with Emily Harrison. Her cousin Opal Carew was safely disposed of, since the dead tell no tales. Even as she told herself this, Opal looked round trembling as if she feared that the dead girl might come back and call her to account. She did not really believe in any sort of life after death, but still she trembled. While professing orthodoxy, since she found that most mothers liked their governesses to hold some form of creed, Opal neither believed in, nor cared for, anything beyond the one life which had hitherto proved so barren to her. But she, not being a born materialist, her mind instinctively groped after something supernatural. Every form of superstition, from the primitive churchyard ghost to advanced spiritualism, had a fascination for her. There

was nothing to encourage a taste for spiritualism at the Glebe House. It was a subject which would have been dismissed with contemptuous jesting. But Opal had never shaken off the impression that there was something uncanny in the house itself. She heard footsteps in the passage when no one was there; she called out in answer to phantom knocks at the door; she started out of her sleep with the impression that some one was trying her window, and saw nothing but the white gleam of the tombstones and the outline of the old church tower. Everyone recognised the fact that it was a house full of unaccountable noises. but the family never seemed to care. The servants made no complaints, but Opal knew that they preferred herding together three in one bed-room to occupying the two provided for them.

Under the pretext that her room was warmer than the small one allotted to Bow-wow, Opal had contrived to get the child

for a companion. Greta refused to have a fire in her room, whatever the temperature, and Bowwow was rather ambitious of hardening herself also, though she scarcely looked a fit subject for Spartan discipline. But Opal's company was a delight to her, and Opal's influence over her was immense. The family were not reticent before the governess, but Bowwow told her everything. Opal found no difficulty in drawing out such information as was not given spontaneously. From Bowwow she discovered that Jack's admiration was not unmixed with criticism. He found Opal pretty, all but her 'strange drab eyes.'

But Opal bided her time. She was content to win the women of the family before she laid siege to the man. Observation, founded perhaps on previous failures, had taught her that a man who believes in the women of his own household will usually let his opinion of other women be coloured by theirs. A man in

love will of course see or blunder for himself, but he can only fall in love with a few of the women he meets. Whether he regards the rest with favour will mostly depend on the women who happen to have his ear.

Opal took care that Jack should hear nothing but her praises from Mrs. Daman and Greta. They were both her warm partisans. Mrs. Daman took pride in Opal's improved looks, as the soft climate and easy life began to tell favourably on her health. Greta catered for admiration of Opal's beauty in her own small circle. She was prepared to fight Opal's battles when Aunt Sophy came, as she remarked, to play her usual part of skeleton at their Christmas feast.

This year, however, Aunt Sophy preferred to remain at Bournemouth, where Miss Withers was bearing her company.

'Perhaps she expects us to ask her too,' said Greta; 'but I don't think we could

quite live up to a bishop's cousin, especially a bishop's cousin whom Aunt Sophy finds perfection.'

In private Greta remarked to Opal,

'It's all your fault, you know; you've frightened away our nearest relation. And you'll have to try to make yourself a skeleton instead. We shall be too happy if we don't have a skeleton.'

CHAPTER V.

It was perhaps not altogether by chance that a silver thimble fell out of the Christmas pudding on to Bowwow's plate, but only fate could have arranged that Opal should secure both the ring and the sixpence, omens of success which gladdened her more than she ventured to show.

‘Hullo, young lady,’ cried Mr. Daman, addressing Greta, ‘you’re not the only one to be married next year, it seems.’

‘But I’m not going to be married next year,’ replied Greta. ‘Fancy being married in the winter ; I mean to be married in the spring.’

‘But we’re going to be married in November, directly after my birthday ; that

was always settled,' said Jack, with some excitement.

'You may have settled it, I never did. One can only be married once,' remarked Greta, disregarding the fact that their parents were a living instance to the contrary, 'and I mean to have a pretty wedding, with flowers and sunshine and green trees waving against the church windows, not bare trees, with mud a foot deep, and a wet white mist creeping up round you like a shroud. November is a month to be buried in, not married.'

'Well,' said Jack, doggedly, 'I was born in November, and I mean to get married in November, and I don't mind being buried in November, since I must be buried some time.'

'Be married in November by all means, since you are so set on it, only it won't be to me.'

An angry, pained look came into Jack's face. He pushed back his chair and seemed

about to rush from the room, when Bow-wow ran round and laid a detaining hand on his coat.

‘Never mind her,’ she cried, trying to look daggers at her sister. ‘I mean to be very kind to my lover,’ she added, with severe dignity, which made even Jack laugh.

Under cover of the table, he extended his fingers to Greta, who gave them a friendly rebuff.

‘We can go straight off to Cannes,’ he murmured, ‘and get plenty of sunshine and flowers; oranges too,’ he added, with a vague recollection of a passage in the ‘Lady of Lyons,’ which would come in beautifully here if he could only remember poetry.

‘Cannes is very pleasant in the spring, I believe,’ replied Greta; then, looking mischievously in Jack’s mutinous face, she took a shining bangle from her arm and a ring from her finger, which she proffered,

remarking, 'The letters can be forwarded to-morrow in a half-penny wrapper.'

'You want Aunt Sophy to keep you in order,' observed Mr. Daman.

'There's nothing like having a common enemy,' replied Greta; 'we never fight before Aunt Sophy. She thinks me very bad, but not quite bad enough for Jack.'

Mrs. Daman was heard to murmur something about peace and good-will.

'Oh! I forgot,' cried Greta; 'we're bound not to talk against anyone on Christmas Day. We never want to talk against anyone but Aunt Sophy, and she's generally here.'

'Let's drink her health,' said Jack; 'this is the first Christmas she's spent away from us; let us hope it won't be the last.'

Jack had recovered his temper, but he did not give up his point. He pleaded with unavailing persistency that there had been a tacit agreement that the wedding

should take place as soon after his coming of age as possible. To this Greta could only reply that it had been too far off for her to care much about it. On the last day of the old year, Jack made another appeal, but Greta only ran out of the room, declaring that she never gave anything to importunate beggars.

‘Did you ever know a girl tease so?’ asked Jack, addressing Opal, who had been a silent observer.

‘She’s too full of fun to take anything seriously; I daresay it will be all right when the time comes. And, even if you should have to wait a few months, what would it matter? But I oughtn’t to say that, perhaps; I’ve never been in love.’

‘If Greta begins putting it off, she may go on for years,’ said Jack, beginning to walk about impatiently. ‘I’ve been counting the weeks and the days to my coming of age ever since we were engaged. I never dreamt of having to wait longer.

I've gone on living in this hole, never going anywhere or seeing anyone, just because I didn't care to go away till Greta could go with me. And now she wants to keep me dragging on for ever.'

Jack had never been confidential with Opal before, and she wondered how she could make the most of her opportunity.

'Should you be angry if I spoke plainly?' she asked.

'Of course not.'

'Then I think, being a woman myself, I know a little better what women feel than you do. Greta is very fond of you, you can have no doubt about that; but she can't help presuming a little on your absolute, I might almost say your abject, devotion. If she felt a little less sure of you, if she believed it possible that you could do without her, she would behave quite differently.'

'You believe in the spaniel theory?' said Jack, rather contemptuously. 'But

how can one woman judge of another who is quite different?’

‘ You think I’m only telling you what I should feel.’ Then, with a flash of spirit which was a revelation to Jack, Opal went on, rapidly, ‘ I may be a patient Griselda by nature, my life may have taught me to find something even lower than my own level; but I can read Greta for all that. Besides, I hear her speak of you.’

‘ Greta would never say a word against me, she’s as true and loyal as—’ Jack stopped short, doubting whether steel could be fitly described as loyal.

‘ You don’t suppose I mean that. But she talks more like a woman who has been married for years, than a girl who is excited and eager over her lover. Come now, don’t you confess that you love her better because she plagues you.’

‘ Do you mean that I ought to plague her in return? I should get much the

worst of it, and we should quarrel dreadfully.'

'You needn't copy her. Tit for tat is always a mistake in love affairs. But you might go your own way a little more, and let her go hers. Don't grumble when she goes to see Mrs. Randall, let her stay with her if she likes. Don't go on as if you couldn't bear her out of your sight.'

'I can't, that's the truth, and as for letting her go to parties without me, why, it's bad enough sometimes when I'm there.'

'In fact you're jealous, but you never give her a chance of being jealous about you.'

'How can I make her jealous? Will you take me in hand yourself, Miss Carew?'

Opal drew back, and a colour came into her face which made her for a moment look beautiful.

‘What a dull, blundering boy,’ she thought. Aloud she said, sternly,

‘I think you might see that I’m not that sort of girl. Perhaps I sometimes forget that I’m not quite so old as I feel. But I want to be a friend to you and Greta, for I like you both very much.’

Opal had been keeping her eyes slightly averted so that Jack could only see the long eyelashes which fringed both lids, the compressed classical profile, and the little blue-black head bent forward in a way which somehow suggested modesty. He had not been oblivious of the fact that his Mentor was very pretty. And being in truth a blundering boy, with no great measure of self-confidence, he felt ashamed of himself for having ventured on the familiarity of a doubtful jest. He scarcely knew how to apologise, and blessed Bow-wow for choosing this moment to rush in, and break up the interview.

‘Why don’t you come out?’ cried the

child, 'they've been singing carols. They'll ring the joy-bells to-night; do wake me up to hear them.'

'No,' said her mother, 'little girls are much better asleep. New years don't matter to them.'

'They're not going to be married before the year's out,' remarked Jack.

'Nor their elders either,' retorted Greta, bringing in a rush of fresh air.

'Time enough to talk of that,' said Mrs. Daman. 'Only don't wrangle. Why, I once knew a match broken off after the bride had got her wedding-dress, just because she wanted a gay wedding, and the bridegroom wouldn't have it.'

'A good job she found him out in time,' returned Greta; 'what business had the bridegroom to interfere? It's very kind of the bride to marry him.'

'Do you sit up to see the new year in?' asked Opal, turning the subject.

'Jack and I do,' replied Greta. 'Mother

is rather fond of sneaking off to bed.'

'Father will sneak off too, I hope,' said Mrs. Daman. 'He's got a nasty cold.'

'Father doesn't seem quite up to his usual mark.'

'Poor Kent's illness worries him,' said Mrs. Daman, speaking of Mr. Daman's partner.

'But he's not so very fond of old Kent, and I'm sure he's used to doing all the work.'

'It would be awkward if anything happened to Kent just now.'

'Oh, money,' said Greta, with the indifference of a girl who had never known the want of it. 'But, if old Kent went out to-morrow, Jack would make it all right.'

'Yes, in November,' observed Jack.

'But they'd let you have money before November if you wanted it.'

'Would they?'

'Why, what difference could a few months make?'

‘A good deal of difference in law, and a good deal of difference to them too, if I happened to die in those few months. I don’t feel much like dying, but I daresay they haven’t quite given up hope. The trustees happen to be also the heirs,’ he explained to Opal.

‘It was a trick of Jack’s grandfather to cut father out,’ said Greta.

‘I don’t know about it’s being a trick,’ said Jack. ‘I suppose he had a right to do what he liked with his own. If I didn’t live to grow up, he wanted those other fellows to get the benefit.’

‘Can’t you make a will?’ asked Opal.

‘Not till November, and, since marriage invalidates a man’s will, it won’t be worth while to make one till after the wedding.’

‘Then take care of your precious life till April twelvemonth,’ cried Greta; ‘but don’t let us be talking about death and wills and all sorts of horrid things on New Year’s eve.’

Opal suspected that Jack was preparing to stop a leaky ship, but she could not find out any more. When the elders had gone to bed, the three young people drew their chairs round the fire and waited impatiently for the new year to be born.

‘I wish we lived in a palace of truth, and had to say out everything we thought,’ said Greta, looking hard at Opal, who was very far from desiring such a habitation.

‘I sometimes have a fancy I can tell if anything particular is going to happen in the new year,’ said Opal. ‘I have a fancy about this one,’ she added, oracularly. ‘Did you ever try the *Sortes Virgilianæ*? You take a book—the Bible usually—open it at random, and read the first passage which meets your eye, taking it as prophetic.’

‘Oh, that must be great fun,’ said Greta; ‘but isn’t it rather profane to take the Bible?’

‘Very good people used to do it. Scotch people, I think, chiefly. But they didn’t make a joke of it certainly. Any poetry book will do just as well. Shakespeare or Browning, though perhaps you’d find him rather obscure.’

‘We haven’t got him. There’s a Tennyson somewhere.’

‘I’ll find it,’ said Jack.

‘Here goes,’ he exclaimed, returning with the book, and opening it as he came in.

“He died, he went to burning flame.”

‘That’s nice.’

‘It’s not *he* but *she* in the original,’ observed Opal.

‘Ah, so it is. That makes it less personal perhaps.’

‘I didn’t know there were such horrid things in Tennyson,’ said Greta. ‘But you picked that out on purpose, Jack; I saw your finger in the place before you

pretended to begin. I mean to have something much prettier, only I shan't cheat.' And opening, she read:

“ ‘There's a new foot on the floor, my friend,
And a new face at the door, my friend,
A new face at the door.’ ”

Oh, I don't believe in Tennyson.'

‘It's my turn,’ said Opal. She was the only one who put any faith in the test. Pressing her finger well into the book before she opened, she read :

“ ‘But, as he walked, King Arthur panted hard,
Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed,
When all the house is mute.’ ”

‘That only means indigestion; I think you're let off cheap,’ said Jack.

Opal was studying the context of her passage but she could not make much out of it.

‘Hark the bells!’ cried Greta, rushing to the door.

Opal followed, but drew back at the first blast of night air. She could see the lovers

standing hand in hand. Jack would have spoken, but Greta pressed his fingers to make him keep silence. She seemed to be holding her breath as the bells ceased and twelve solemn strokes sounded. Then the peal broke out again. 'Welcome, New Year!' shouted Greta, joyfully greeting the unknown.

She came back into the house like sunshine, her happy radiant beauty throwing Opal into a mere shadow of her own bright girlhood. No doubts, no misgivings for Greta. The future must be as the past and yet more abundant.

CHAPTER VI.

‘WHO can this letter be from? it’s a woman’s writing,’ said Greta, taking up a letter addressed to Jack. ‘I shall open it directly if he doesn’t come down.’

‘I wonder you don’t,’ said Opal, who knew that Greta usually treated Jack’s property as her own. ‘Now he’s got a chance of making her jealous,’ she thought. The idea did not, however, occur to Jack, who let Greta read the letter over his shoulder as a matter of course.

‘DEAR MR. DAMAN,

‘We are going to have a fancy ball on the 28th, and shall be very

pleased if you and your sister will give us the pleasure of your company and stay the night.

‘Yours sincerely,

‘MARY OLIVER.’

A formal invitation was enclosed.

‘I shall tell them I haven’t got a sister, at least not old enough,’ remarked Jack.

‘But I shall write and accept,’ said Greta. ‘How nice of Mrs. Oliver to ask me when she never set eyes on me in her life.’

‘That’s Tom’s doing, I expect.’ Jack did not look altogether pleased. ‘I remember he made me introduce him to you at Fern Lea.’

‘And a very slow young man I found him. All the slow stupid young men take to me; it’s a great bore.’

‘Thanks,’ said Jack.

‘You may be stupid, but you’re not slow. I wasn’t thinking of you. Now, just write

and explain that my name isn't Daman yet, and I'll accept in my proper person. What shall I go as? that's the great question.'

'A Spanish lady, I've got a matador's dress.'

'Then if you think I'm going to cry, "Bravo, Toro!" like the woman in the picture, you're very much mistaken,' cried Greta, who supposed Toro to refer to the tormentor and not to the tormented. Opal began proposing Marguerite, and other hackneyed characters.

'I won't be a sentimental, lachrymose creature,' cried Greta. 'I don't mind being a peasant, or a season, or anything that hasn't a character to keep up. I tell you what, Opal, I'll go as a Cheechee.'

'What on earth is that?' asked Jack.

Opal, who did not relish the joke, observed,

'You'll have to draw on your own imagination for the costume;' then added, quickly, 'What do you say to White Cat?'

‘I’d rather be White Kitten, but I’m too big. Well, you’re no good, either of you. I shall go round to Miss Pearse, and settle something with her.’

‘No, come to Plymouth with me, and choose anything you like at Hannay’s,’ said Jack.

Greta jumped at this offer. Her relations with Jack were too easy and intimate for her to think anything of his supplying a deficiency in her wardrobe. Many of the little luxuries at the Glebe House were provided by Jack as a matter of course, and no one ever thought of thanking him.

‘Opal must go too; she has such good taste, and Bowwow was promised tea at the shop next time we went,’ said Greta.

Out of regard for Bowwow’s studies, the expedition was put off till the afternoon, when the four took train to Plymouth. Greta’s business did not take so long as might have been expected. Hannay’s young lady failed to recognise a ‘Chee-

chee' as coming within the category of orthodox fancy costumes, but she produced a pictured representation of what she called a Manola.

'This would suit you much better than an Oriental costume,' she declared. 'It is a Spanish dress, a sort of brigand-queen; you see, she has a dagger.'

'Spanish! that's all right. You couldn't have anything nicer than this,' said Jack.

'You needn't be trammelled by conventionalities, if you're a brigandess,' whispered Opal.

'The young lady has just the complexion for a Manola,' remarked the shopwoman, who would probably have found Opal's, or even Bowwow's complexion equally suitable.

'Shall you have a real dagger?' asked Bowwow, who thought this the most interesting part of the costume.'

'Oh, yes; I wouldn't carry a duffer.'

‘I’ll get you one ; they’d only give you rubbish here,’ said Jack.

As they left the shop, Greta declared her intention of calling on Mrs. Randall.

‘I haven’t been near her for an age,’ she observed.

Jack was standing back, to let Opal pass : she gave him a warning look.

‘Go to your Mrs. Randall,’ he cried. ‘We’ll take Bowwow to see the shops, and meet you at the governor’s.’

‘Won’t you come too, Opal?’ asked Greta.

‘I’m very sorry, but I do so want to buy a few things, and I’m afraid there won’t be time afterwards.’

Greta gave a lingering look at Jack as she turned away.

‘It seems too bad,’ he said, preparing to run after her.

Opal was a believer in mesmerism, thought-reading, and all occult ‘sciences’

which a nervous and excitable generation has conjured up. She had been willing Jack with all her might to stay behind, and she had believed herself successful. But she was driven to try other arts.

‘I’ll go,’ she cried. ‘Don’t throw away your advantage. She will ask you next time.’

Jack hesitated. Greta passed out of sight, and Opal’s first victory was won.

Mrs. Randall had a day at home, though she had not thought fit to inform Greta of the fact. For the first time Greta happened to stumble on it. The room was full when she went in. Mrs. Randall greeted her with her usual warmth, made some effort to find her a seat, and then left her somewhat stranded. The people round were laughing and talking like old friends, and Greta could not force herself into their conversation. Her first instinct was to retreat, but having accepted a cup of boiling tea, she felt bound to stay and finish it.

She soon got amused watching the people : one little lady especially attracted her. She was not good-looking, nor in Greta's opinion very young, but there was something taking about her. She was handsomely dressed in rich mourning, her lively manner contrasting with her sombre dress.

Greta quite envied the ease with which she went about talking to one and another. Presently she came into Greta's corner to look at a picture, and began talking to her about it. Then she slipped into a seat by Greta's side and fell into conversation.

'What a lot of visitors Mrs. Randall has to-day,' remarked Greta. 'I don't know one of them.'

'And I know most of them, though I don't live at Plymouth.'

'Then can you tell me the name of that very ugly young man who is talking to Mrs. Randall?'

Greta glanced across at a tall man with a sunburnt face and a very long neck,

who had been staring at her so much that she fancied he must be a friend of Jack's.

‘Ugly,’ cried the lady, ‘why, most people think him very good-looking.’

Greta looked astonished ; then a new idea struck her.’

‘Oh, I’m so sorry,’ she exclaimed, ‘I didn’t know he was a relation.’

‘But I didn’t say that he was.’

‘No, but I thought that I saw a likeness.’ Then she stopped with sudden consternation.

‘Things one would rather not have said,’ remarked the lady. ‘I’m not offended, I think him handsome. And what’s more, I think him like you.’

‘That’s odd, considering he’s not my brother.’

‘He’s your cousin, though,’—Greta gave a quick, inquiring glance at her companion ‘I’m your cousin too—Fred Charlstrom.’

Greta drew back. Dislike of her father’s

people was almost an article of faith with her. But seeing the friendly face, remembering, too, all that the black dress signified, she took the hand which was held out to her.

‘We ought to know each other better; may I come and see you,’ said Frederika, or Fred, as she preferred to call herself.

‘Of course you may, we shall be very pleased,’ said Greta, rising to go.

She did not quite know how to take this new acquaintance.

‘We must be going too,’ said Fred, ‘you must let me present Bob to you. He’s quartered here; I’m staying at Mutley. Oh, it’s raining,’ she exclaimed, glancing at the window. ‘Can we drop you anywhere?’

‘No, thanks, I don’t mind rain, and I’m only going to my father’s in George Street.’

‘But you may as well let us take you there.’

‘They’ll think I’m ashamed of the shop,’ said Greta, to herself. So she consented to be driven.

‘It’s a wine-merchant’s on the right-hand side, “Daman and Kent,”’ she explained.

‘I couldn’t have believed she’d be so nice,’ remarked Fred to her brother, as Greta disappeared into the shop, ‘so perfectly natural and unaffected. Did you notice how unconcerned she looked when she was sitting all alone with no one to talk to?’

‘I thought she looked uncommonly pretty. I wanted to go and talk to her myself, only she seemed rather standoffish.’

‘Because you stared at her so. A pretty girl doesn’t care to be stared at. It’s a compliment to a plain one.’

‘You find it so?’

‘Well, she didn’t return your admiration,’ retorted his sister. And she re-

peated Greta's unfortunate remarks, adding, 'She didn't attempt to apologise, which I thought good form. She has no manners at present any more than a child, but that's ever so much better than having bad manners. Do you think her at all like poor Edith?'

Meanwhile Greta was getting some fun out of her adventure. Jack had been rather disturbed at not finding her when he came in. He was late himself, having ransacked the curiosity shops to find a dagger worthy of his Manola. After he had waited impatiently for at least ten minutes, he saw Greta arrive in a strange carriage, out of which she was handed by a strange young man.

'I've made a friend,' she cried, as she came in, thinking only of her girl cousin till she saw Jack's face, which moved her to mischief, 'Fred Charlstrom—we embraced and swore friendship in the carriage.'

'What?' roared Jack.

‘Cousins, you know,’ said Greta, demurely.

‘You let that fellow kiss you?’

‘I’m sure she didn’t,’ said Mr. Daman.

Bowwow was sitting with eyes fixed mournfully on the tea-table.

‘Greta always spoils everything,’ she remarked. ‘I thought we were going to have such a nice tea.’

‘So we will,’ said Greta, drawing up her chair.

‘I don’t want you,’ cried Bowwow, pushing her away. ‘It’s sure to be nonsense, it always is,’ she went on, trying to comfort Jack.

Mr. Daman was doing his best to coax Greta into good behaviour, whilst Jack stood aloof with a face which would have made his fortune as a tragic actor, at least in the provinces.

Opal thought it expedient to effect a reconciliation. She had not been alto-

gether successful that afternoon. Jack had obviously regretted following her advice, and he had speedily left her to the company of Bowwow. But he should have reason to thank her yet. With an air of conviction, she observed,

‘I saw a lady in the carriage, and I am quite sure she was the cousin Greta meant.’

Jack muttered something about Fred not being a girl’s name, but Greta slew her own joke by exclaiming,

‘Oh! Opal, why did you spoil it all when I had got such a splendid rise out of him?’

Peace was restored and sealed by the present of a very beautiful little dagger, which was handed round and admired by everyone as they sat over the tea-table. Mr. Daman, however, took exception to the offering.

‘In my young days,’ he declared,

‘knives and scissors and all such weapons were not thought fit for sweethearts to give. They were said to cut love.’

CHAPTER VII.

FRED CHARLSTROM would certainly have engrossed Greta's thoughts for the next few weeks if it had not been for the counter-excitement of the fancy ball. Fred's eagerness for intimacy quickly dispersed any lingering prejudice which might have been felt by Mrs. Daman and Greta. They were both full of their new friend's liveliness and good humour, whilst her attainments, as set forth by herself, fairly dazzled them.

Perhaps the performance with which Fred favoured them on the piano scarcely filled up the measure of their expectations ; but, when she talked as if she could

lead an orchestra, they felt that their doubts had been impious. On her second visit, Fred took away their breath by telling them that she had exhibited a picture. On the third, she electrified them by the announcement that she had written a novel. Such a firing of real guns was a miracle to Avonuish.

Jack refused to share their enthusiasm. Fred was not pretty, and she had snubbed him once or twice when he betrayed glaring ignorance. Opal was in secret sympathy with him.

‘I don’t think Miss Charlstrom so very clever myself,’ she confided to Jack one day, when Fred had carried Greta off, as she was rather fond of doing. ‘It’s no great distinction to publish a shilling dreadful, and, as for that magazine she writes for, you never saw such a hole-and-corner concern. I should think it must be kept up by the subscriptions of the contributors. No woman of eight-and-

twenty could do all Miss Charlstrom does, and do it well.'

'Eight-and-twenty's no chicken,' remarked Jack.

'No, but a woman must be well past the chicken stage before she can achieve much in art or literature, much less in both, unless she happens to be a heaven-born genius. Don't you know how they say that few actresses can play very difficult parts, such as Juliet, for instance, till they cease to look fit for the character. A girl's very good to look at, but she's not good for much else, in my opinion.'

'But a girl must know more when she's just left school,' replied Jack, who had lost no time in forgetting the little learning which had been forced upon him.

'I should have said that her education was only going to begin. What we learn at school is nothing but a preparation—at least, that's all it ought to be. But, unluckily for me, I have to keep on grinding

over and over again at the old lessons, instead of learning something new like Miss Charlstrom.'

'I daresay you're quite as clever as she is.'

Opal thought that she was probably a good deal cleverer than Fred.

'Miss Charlstrom didn't come out well in the one test I applied. I daresay you didn't notice, but, when she was talking as if she could speak every language under the sun, I managed to entrap her into a little French conversation. Well, she didn't talk quite like a native. With all her show of accomplishments, I don't think she'd do for a finishing governess any better than I should.'

'Why shouldn't you do for a finishing governess?' asked Jack, to whom it had never occurred that such an article would scarcely have been secured for Bowwow.

'Because I've been teaching instead of learning ever since I was seventeen. If I

could only have one year's training now, if I could even have my time over again, I would do much better.'

'It seems an awful shame,' said Jack. He had never thought so before; he had taken it as a matter of course that Opal should have to teach Bowwow.

Having brought Jack to this desirable frame of mind, Opal dropped her serious tone, not wishing him to weary for Greta's return. She was teaching him to look to herself for amusement when he could not get the companion he preferred. Opal bore with patience his incessant talk of Greta, finding some compensation for the tedium of listening to a lover's song of praise, in the fact that she was also the confidant of his not unfrequent grumbles. Fred was a subject of discord, and her visits helped to throw Opal and Jack a good deal together; but Fred went back to London the day before Mrs. Oliver's ball, and Greta was too much engrossed by

her anticipations to show any great regret.

Almost up to the last moment, Greta was kept in a state of apprehension by the non-arrival of the Manola's dress. When it did come, there was only just time to pack it in her box without letting Mrs. Daman have more than a passing glimpse of it. As some compensation, Greta promised to put it on when she came back again.

Mrs. Daman and Opal found their evening rather dull. Mrs. Daman kept expressing a wish that she could see her young people, Opal wished secretly that she could be taking her part with them. Both looked forward rather eagerly to their return next day.

'I suppose they won't stay more than one day,' said Mrs. Daman, when luncheon time passed without bringing the travellers.

'I should think not. They'll most likely come by the 3.52 train.'

‘They can’t walk,’ observed Mrs. Daman, looking at the landscape, blind with rain. She was impatient to enjoy a little vicarious excitement and admiration. Jack would be sure to tell her all the pretty things which had been said of Greta in her Manola’s dress.

Opal thought that Jack might very likely be in one of his fits of jealous ill-temper. She was quite disappointed when she heard his cheery tones in the hall. There was no cloud between the lovers as they came in, both talking at once, and full of enjoyment.

‘It was great fun watching the people,’ observed Greta, after the first clamour had subsided, ‘but I had to dance a great deal with Jack, he was my only defence from Tom Oliver who pestered me dreadfully.’

‘Did your dress fit?’ asked Mrs. Daman.

‘Oh, yes, beautifully, I’ll go and put it on.’

Mrs. Daman seized the opportunity, directly Greta went out, of asking Jack what people thought of Manola.

As a lover Jack was able to satisfy her on this point. Everyone had wanted to know who Greta was, all the fellows had wanted to get introduced to her. Mrs. Oliver had said so many pretty things that Jack could not restrain himself from privately acquainting her with his claims. He did not mention whether this was done out of consideration for Tom; but he besought them on no account to betray his breach of faith to Greta. At the moment when he was impressing this upon them, Greta came flying back with a good deal of jingle and clatter.

‘It’s my sequins,’ she explained. ‘I scattered them about all over the place, but I haven’t lost them all yet.’

Sequins, as she called them, were a leading feature of Greta’s dress. The short brown satin skirt was edged with them, so was the

crimson velvet Zouave jacket, so was the little crimson velvet cap which sat jauntily on Greta's curly hair. Soft yellow draperies and a loose muslin bodice completed the costume, whilst Jack's dagger was stuck as conspicuously as possible in her belt.

'It astonished people so,' she cried, drawing it out of the sheath and flashing it before the delighted eyes of Bowwow, 'no one else had such a workman-like weapon. But one horrid man said that a Manola was not a brigand queen at all, but an itinerant seller of wine and spirits. I told him it was a very suitable calling for my father's daughter, but I asked what I should want with a dagger in such a peaceful profession, and he said my liquors might be contraband. I shall call father a Manolo for the future.—Ah, there he is!' and Greta flew to meet Mr. Daman, her coins making music as she ran.

'Manolo and Manola,' she cried, coming

in with her arm round her step-father and her face on a level with his.

Greta's fresh beauty and picturesque attire contrasted oddly with the commonplace features and mud-splashed dress of the little man who had just tramped home through Devonshire lanes.

'I hadn't the heart to damp her pleasure,' he told his wife afterwards, in the privacy of their room, 'but I had bad news to-day. Poor Kent's had another stroke, and they say it's all up with him. And, if his executors want their money before November, the shutters must go up, that's all.'

'They'll wait,' said his wife, soothingly. 'Jack will give any guarantee they like.'

Jack meanwhile had stopped his Manola on the landing to ask a favour.

'I hope you won't mind,' he began, hesitating a little, 'but I can't bear the idea of your keeping that dagger. Every-

one says it's such an unlucky thing to give. And it's no use, you know.'

'Do you want it back? how mean! I didn't know you were so superstitious,' exclaimed Greta. But she gave up the dagger, nevertheless, having some secret misgiving.

As Greta's door closed, Opal stole gently out of her room. She had left a French novel, which she did not care to have seen lying about, in the school-room. She found Jack contemplating the dagger rather ruefully.

'What, have you made her give it up?' she asked, laughing.

'Yes, but it does seem mean to take back a present. And it's almost as if she'd given it to me now. I shall just chuck the thing away.'

'Don't do that, it's a pity.'

'Will you have it then? Only don't let Greta get hold of it again.'

'She shan't even know that I've got it.'

Opal took the little weapon eagerly ; it had a sort of fascination for her. She touched it almost caressingly before hiding it away amongst her treasures.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE lanes were in a mist of green, the banks alight with primroses, when Fred Charlstrom wrote asking Greta to come and stay for a fortnight at Lancaster Gate.

‘Isn’t it delightful?’ cried Greta, running to Opal, like a child, with the news.

‘Mr. Jack Daman will not let you go,’ remarked Opal, Jack not being at home to speak for himself.

Greta looked mutinous.

‘But I shall go.’

‘No, he will put his foot down. A woman always has to give in.’

‘I never give in to Jack.’

‘You gave in about your marriage.’

Opal never quite understood how Jack had gained his victory, but it seemed to be an understood thing that the wedding should take place before Christmas.

‘All the more reason why I should have my own way now,’ returned Greta.

‘You won’t, though. You can’t very well accept without consulting him, and he will take care you don’t accept at all.’

‘But I will accept now, this very minute, and tell him nothing till the letter’s gone.’

If Opal offered any remonstrance she took care that it should be of a kind to confirm Greta’s resolution. She felt as if fate were doing her a good turn at last; to get rid of Greta for a fortnight was something. It was a good deal more that Greta should displease Jack sufficiently to leave a breach between them.

Jack’s anger, however, was not long lived. His wrath vented itself chiefly in

taunting Greta with her eagerness to grasp the scanty olive branch held out to her rather late in the day. It was a view of the situation which had not occurred to Greta in her delight at the prospect of something new. Perhaps she felt her inconsistency and half regretted her prompt action. At all events, she added less fuel to the flame which Jack kindled than usual.

Opal's triumph was in all respects brief. Before Greta left home, a letter came from Aunt Sophy offering a visit.

‘And you would have made me reject a chance of escape,’ exclaimed Greta; whilst Jack promptly announced his intention of going away too.

To Opal's dismay he took himself off to visit friends at Exeter, travelling so far with Greta, who would not let him go any farther.

‘They'll meet me at Paddington. I can't come to any grief locked up in the railway-carriage, with a guard to look after

me every time we stop,' she represented, as Jack showed a decided unwillingness to leave her. 'Get out at your proper station or I won't marry you for another year.'

'Poor Jack,' she said to herself, as she drew in her head after waving him a farewell, 'he'd be awfully dull travelling back by himself—getting to his friends at some unearthly hour too. And he'd be sure to make himself nasty to anyone who met me. I'm glad Fred never found out I was engaged to him.'

Engagements reminded Greta of poor Edith's unhappy lover. Fred had told her that he went abroad directly after the accident—he could not bear to see anyone. She complained that they missed him dreadfully, for they regarded him as a brother. Mrs. Randall had shocked Greta very much by declaring that they would not object to regard him as something else, adding that she thought Maud would have a better chance than Fred,

since she was younger and better-looking.

Greta's lonely journey seemed rather long. She looked eagerly for Fred when the train at last entered Paddington station. Some of the others she thought might come too, but Fred was sure to be there. As she looked round, a servant with a military cockade came up and conducted her to the carriage which had been sent to meet her. To Greta's surprise it was empty. The drive was a very short one, and the glimpse which Greta caught of trees and grass in Kensington Gardens looked inviting, but the tall house struck her as dreary, and there was no one to receive her in the great empty hall. Presently a maid appeared and took her up many flights to her bed-room. Greta ran to the window but instead of gardens she saw only opposite houses.

‘What an ugly view ; I shouldn't like to live in London,’ she exclaimed.

‘Oh, miss, you should see the backs of

some of the London houses. Why, this one has got as good as two fronts.'

'May I dress you now before my young ladies come in?' asked the maid, when she had unpacked Greta's things.

'Dress me! Oh, no, thanks, I was never dressed in my life,' replied Greta, with trifling exaggeration. 'Is there going to be a party?' she asked, seeing her best attire laid out.

'Not exactly a party, miss, but I believe there's about six to dinner. Captain Mace is here besides. Dinner's at eight,' she added.

'I'm glad there's going to be something more than a family party,' thought Greta, as she dressed herself.

As eight o'clock approached, she wondered whether it would be as well to find her way downstairs. But she thought Fred could not have quite forgotten her.

Fred was at that moment in the drawing-room, preparing the young man who

was to take down her country cousin.

‘You must be very kind and nice to her,’ she was saying, ‘she’s totally uneducated and not quite tame yet—a blazing Radical.’

‘Oh, the monster!’ interjected the young man.

‘But,’ added Fred, ‘she’s awfully pretty.’

‘Fetch her down at once.’

‘I suppose I must. It’s a dozen flights of stairs; she might have spared me.’

Fred hurried away and enfolded Greta in a warm embrace with profuse apologies.

‘It’s just dinner-time. Arundel—Captain Mace is to take you in, I’m sure you’ll like him,’ she told Greta, as they came downstairs.

A dozen people made very little show in the large drawing-room. Fred took Greta up to a thin, cross-looking old man with a red face—such was Greta’s description of the general, who had thought himself one of the handsomest men of his day. Then she introduced her to an un-

interesting lady who had marred the looks and mended the fortunes of the family. Fred had to pass over Maud, a somewhat colossal and stolid beauty, in her haste to present Captain Mace as dinner was announced.

Arundel Mace did not look at all like the broken-hearted hero of romance whom Greta had pictured. He was a good-looking, well-made young man, who gave a general impression of well-being, which seemed scarcely appropriate to his present circumstances. There was a cheerful ring in his voice, too, as he addressed Greta.

‘You were not in time for the great libel case, Miss Charlstrom.’ Then, as she looked blank, he went on, ‘Didn’t Fred tell you that she’d been in court all day, Peter against Pindar, you know. I dare say you’ve seen it in the papers.’

‘I never read the papers.’

‘And yet you have pronounced political opinions, I hear.’

‘Fred told you that because I always disagree with her.’

‘She says you’re a Radical,—I suppress her adjectives.’

‘I’m not, I’m a Liberal.’

‘May I ask where you draw the line?’

‘I don’t want to dynamite people.’

‘That makes me feel a little easier in your company. But you seem fond of primroses.’

Arundel glanced at a bunch which Greta had brought for Fred, who had not come in time to claim them.

‘I don’t like them when they’re stuck about in the form of ugly little brooches.’

‘Your badge is prettier, I confess. Don’t throw it away, if you feel it inappropriate; I know some one who would like it.’

Greta thought this an impertinence, and she drew back her little head with an involuntary gesture of offence.

‘I wish I could make her do that again,’ thought Arundel.

With an air of great humility, he addressed her.

‘I’m so sorry, Miss Charlstrom. I didn’t mean to make you look like an outraged canary bird.’

Greta flushed, tried to look dignified, and burst out laughing.

‘I believe you take me for a child, but I’m eighteen.’ She almost felt inclined to add, ‘And going to be married.’

‘I’m afraid my conversation has been rather frivolous. I’ll try to make it better suited to your years. Let me see now—— Do you think that the inductive system really can be applied to metaphysics?’

‘I’ll tell you when I know what inductive means, and what metaphysics means.’

‘You can’t think how you’ve disappointed me. I heard that question once put by a man who came to dinner in a frock-coat, and I’ve never been able to form the least idea as to what it meant. Something told me that you were the person to

explain. Well, never mind—I suppose you're a worshipper of Wagner and the music of the future ?'

'I never hear any good music. I've heard Fred play.'

'And yet you never heard good music! Don't let her hear that. Don't you know that her performance is an education in itself.'

Arundel lowered his voice as he spoke, for Fred was near, and evidently watching to see how they got on.

'I'm still struggling to talk up to you,' he remarked. 'Are you an impressionist, —in painting, I mean?'

'Oh, dear, what is the good of asking me such questions? I live in the country, I go nowhere, and I know nothing.'

'I wish more people made the same confession of faith. It's no use talking to you about the pleasures of the table, for I see you let all the best things go by. But I'm glad you're not quite a blue ribbon.'

‘Oh, no, my father wouldn’t let me; he’s a wine merchant.’

Fred broke in suddenly:

‘Arundel, you must take me to the Old Bailey on Wednesday. Mr. Potter says there’ll be an awful crush.’

‘Old Bailey! Well, upon my word, I almost think that the least “disrespectable” way for a lady to go there is in charge of a policeman.’

‘Nonsense, everybody goes.’

‘Then I should recommend a little graceful eccentricity, for once in a way.’

‘I think it eccentric to go,’ said Fred, defensively. ‘I want a murder for my next novel. My school is essentially realistic.’

‘I’m afraid I can’t help you. I notice “poor pa” always tries to dodge the murders.’

‘Then you must catch a barrister and make him work it.’

‘Do you want a little agreeable excite-

ment?' asked Arundel, turning to Greta, his manner a shade graver than before.

'Oh, no, I wouldn't go for the world.' Then, feeling that her genuine horror was scarcely complimentary to her cousin, she added—'Of course, it's different if you go with a purpose. And Fred's so wonderfully clever at everything.'

'A Jill of all trades!' exclaimed Arundel.

Greta gave him a reproving glance as she followed the other ladies out of the room.

'How do you like him?' asked Fred, taking her arm.

'Oh, not at all—he's so full of jokes.'

'But you don't mind that, surely.'

'I can't understand it, after what you told me.' There was a volume of reproach in Greta's face.

'He was cut up enough at first, poor fellow; I shall never forget his face at the funeral. But you may drive nature out with a fork.'

‘ I hate a man who’s so shallow that his grief doesn’t last beyond the funeral,’ said Greta, hotly.

CHAPTER IX.

ON her first evening at Lancaster Gate, Greta had made up her mind that she was not going to enjoy her visit a bit, that none of the family were nice except Fred, and that even Fred was not so nice as she had seemed at Avonuish. Her letters home were by no means rose-coloured. She did not mean to give Jack the triumph of knowing that she had found cold welcome, but her writing was frank, like her speech. To Captain Mace she gave no quarter. 'To think of the pity I've wasted on that man!' she wrote, indignantly.

A few days later, Greta was enjoying herself more than she could have believed

possible. If General Charlstrom and his wife did not do much for the amusement of their not very welcome guest, Fred and her very efficient lieutenant, Arundel Mace, made up for all deficiencies. Fred, as her mother said, was always glad of an excuse for gadding about, whilst Greta's taste for sight-seeing had never had a chance of getting even the edge worn off. And she could not have gone merry-making in better company. Angry as she was with Arundel, Greta owned to herself that a love-lorn mourner would scarcely have contributed so much to her enjoyment.

When Fred went to study ghastly sensation at the Old Bailey, under the wing of an obliging junior, Arundel, duly mindful of the proprieties, pressed Maud into Greta's service. The two girls had not seen much of each other before. There was a sort of armed neutrality between the sisters, and they never took up each other's friends; besides, Maud did not fall

in with her sister's notions of amusement, for, in spite of her splendid proportions, she lacked Fred's physical power.

The morning after the trial, Fred, inspired by her artistic studies, sat down to her davenport.

'I must not play away all my mornings,' she declared. 'I must get this novel done—I've got another forming.'

'She talks as if they were boils,' remarked Arundel.

'Oh, what a lot you've written!' cried Greta, admiringly, as Fred produced a formidable pile of manuscript.

'This is a three-volume novel,' said Fred, proudly. 'People shan't say that I can write nothing but shilling dreadfuls.'

And she began writing, with a rapidity which put the coping-stone to Greta's admiration.

'Ain't she a-puttin' in the water neither,' observed Arundel.

Even Greta's limited studies had in-

cluded Todgers, and she laughed rather more than Fred quite approved.

Arundel was engaged in devising a monogram for Greta's note-paper.

'Were you christened Greta,' he asked, 'or is it only short for something else?'

'It's all the name I've got.'

'It's a family name,' said Fred. 'I think I shall have a Greta in my next novel; I like short names. What a mouthful yours is—Arundel!'

'It's practically the same as Job,' said he, emboldened by the success of his last adaptation, 'because "'Arry" is an impossible nickname in civilized life.'

This fell rather flat, as Greta, in common with many of her sex, was afflicted with an ignorance of Pickwick.

'We've all got nicknames,' said Fred. 'Maud is really Margret—without the second "a," you know.'

'Is that a distinction?' asked Arundel.

‘It’s uncommon, at least. We’ve got an old sampler of our great-grandmother’s with the name spelt so.’

‘Spelling wasn’t a strong point with our ancestors, especially the females,’ remarked Arundel.

‘Don’t be irreverent. Our great-grandmother was a female.’

‘*Incroyable.*’

‘You know what I mean. She was very clever.’

‘You needn’t tell me that. Are you not her great-granddaughter?’

‘Then there’s Bob,’ continued Fred; have you seen him lately, Greta?’

‘Oh, yes, we often see him.’ Then Greta jumped up. ‘I think I shall go in the gardens; it’s a shame to waste this lovely morning indoors.’

‘Does Bob admire his pretty cousin?’ asked Arundel, as Greta went out.

‘Oh, yes; but he was more taken with

a little governess they've got. He thought her much prettier than Greta.'

'I shouldn't mind seeing that little governess.'

'Oh, but I don't at all agree with Bob. She's got a style of her own, though ; she's very dark, with stone-coloured eyes, which look as if they'd got into her face by mistake. Bob raved most about her figure. She's very lithe—looks as if she'd got no bones.'

'In her dress ?'

'In her body. She doesn't look as if she'd got them in her dress either.'

'It's a case of admiring contraries, for Bob is as bony as a rabbit curry.'

'Bob is very distinguished-looking, and he's very like Greta.'

'In some totally unaccountable way he is.'

'Do you think Greta at all like poor Edith ?'

'Not in the smallest degree.'

‘Mother says she has a look of her, especially about the back of the neck.’

‘Rather a Monmouth Macedonian sort of resemblance. There’s a head above and a body below.’

‘There’s more individuality in a poll than you think for.’

No one ought to have known this better than Arundel, for he had been admiring Greta’s all through the service on the previous Sunday, when he had happened to sit behind her. But he could not recall the one it was supposed to resemble.

‘Well, I’m not getting on with my work,’ said Fred. ‘I wish you’d go out, and walk with Greta.’

‘Miss Greta has given us the slip, but I’ll try to catch her up.’

Greta had walked straight to the round pond, where Arundel joined her.

‘I thought I should find you here,’ he remarked. ‘I should have tried the fountains next. I know the points of at-

traction strangers always make for. Send me away, if you want to enjoy a monopoly of boats and little dirty boys.'

'I'm not particularly fond of my own company.'

'But I am,' returned Arundel, expecting to see a repetition of the canary bird movement.

'Are you ever in earnest, Captain Mace?'

'Very much so, at present.'

'Have you no respect for anything? I don't mean myself,' she went on, hurriedly. 'I don't expect you to think anything of me, I don't want you to either; but a clever woman like Fred, you might do something more than make fun of her.'

'Make love to her, do you mean? She wouldn't have me.'

'No, of course she wouldn't,' said Greta, with an indignation to which he had not the clue; 'but you might believe in her.'

'Should you think me a hardened blas-

phemer, if I ventured to hint a confession of scepticism?’

‘Well, if you don’t think her clever, which shows——’

‘Drivelling idiotcy on my part—don’t spare me, Miss Charlstrom.’

‘You must at least own that she is wonderfully industrious.’

‘Well, I haven’t quite made up my mind whether it is industrious to cover reams of paper with ink or paint, as the case may be, without ever trying to improve the brew—my metaphors are getting mixed, I confess it.’

‘But Fred knows all sorts of things. There’s that little brooch, like an order, that she wears to show that she knows all about bandaging and dressing wounds, and she has passed ever so many examinations.’

‘Heaven defend Tommy Atkins from her ministrations. She would certainly add a new terror to war.’

‘I think she’s perfectly wonderful.’

‘So do I.’

‘I can’t understand a girl being like that.’

‘Nor can I.’

‘What makes her go in for all these things, I wonder?’

‘Did you ever hear of the Scotchman’s prayer, “Gie us a good conceit o’ ourselves”? Heaven grants that prayer to some without the asking. To be less profane (I see you look shocked), did you ever hear of the Brighton boatman’s comment on the Cockneys? “They fears nothing, ’cos they knows nothing.”’

‘Then you don’t give her credit for anything at all?’

‘Oh, yes, I do. She’s got an immense share of a quality which is very popular in the present day. I think I must call it, “go.” She reminds me of the advice an Irish parson I used to sit under was always giving us. I don’t remember his exact words, but the gist of them was, “Do

something—mischief, if you can't do anything else—but, at all events, do something." He was an ardent Liberal, Miss Charlstrom, but he didn't convert me, he only drove me away, and a good many others too. We wouldn't have his advice, and his Liberal brethren didn't need it—it's their motto.'

'Fred is a Conservative.'

'About as much as you are a Liberal. She calls herself Conservative by family tradition, but if ever there was a born Radical!—Her incapacity to keep quiet, her passion for every theory with tantrums in it. Don't think me a false friend; I say all these things to her face. That's one good thing about Fred, she's got one of the best tempers I ever met in a woman.'

'As if women weren't quite as good-tempered as men. Why, the very worst-tempered person I know is a man.' Then, feeling as if she had been disloyal to Jack,

Greta went on: 'Temper isn't everything; it's easy enough for people who haven't got any feelings to keep their temper.'

'That's rather rough on Fred, isn't it?' asked Arundel, who could scarcely be expected to know that Greta was defending her lover.

'You always misunderstand me!' Greta spoke petulantly; then, seeing that her companion only looked amused, she broke out, 'perhaps I'm not worth understanding, but I think other people do take me a little more seriously than you do.'

Arundel's mouth grew demure, but his eyes did not quite satisfy Greta.

'You needn't think you're making me cross,' she cried, more angrily than she had yet spoken; 'of course you never lose your own temper.'

'Oh, I am one of the cold-hearted people you were referring to.' Arundel spoke with irritating good-humour.

‘I wasn’t thinking of you, but I daresay you are,’ replied Greta, too intent on self-defence to regard amenities.

Next minute she felt half frightened lest he should think she meant to refer to Edith. She had no idea that a pretty girl might as well not tax a man with cold-heartedness.

Greta maintained a somewhat stiff manner as they walked home, and she slightly resented the fact that Arundel restrained her from walking right under a passing hansom as she crossed the road.

‘You did meet,’ was Fred’s pleased exclamation as they came in.

She was in the happy condition of an author who feels that he has done a good morning’s work. She did not know that the work was fated never to gladden other eyes than her own. Greta was half disappointed to find Arundel as good-natured and ready to cater for the afternoon’s amusement as usual.

‘He only regards me as a child,’ she thought, ‘to be teased and forgiven and given my little treats as usual.’

CHAPTER X.

GRETA'S first letter home was subjected to a severe scrutiny, not only by her mother but by Aunt Sophy, who arrived just in time to make a few disagreeable remarks. Opal, who had enough at stake to give Aunt Sophy more attention than she would naturally have bestowed on an elderly lady, could not see many traces of the kindness with which Mrs. Daman had credited her sister. But Mrs. Daman had the recollections of long ago. Nature had made the elder sister a shrewder woman than the younger, and it had not, perhaps, given her a larger measure of conceit. But the vanity which found vent in the con-

templation of a pretty daughter was pleasant (except, perhaps, to a few rival mothers), whilst the vanity which exhibited itself in the egotism of a plain old maid was ridiculous. Rich enough to have no need to work, poor enough to have to bestow time and thought on small economies, Aunt Sophy had not led a life which was calculated to develop the more genial side of her character. Her desire for appreciation laid her open to the advances of anyone who thought her worth conciliating. Opal perceived this, and endeavoured by her deferential manner to win favour which would go far towards lulling the suspicions which Emily Harrison's revelations had aroused.

After dinner, when the sisters settled themselves down for a chat, Opal showed the good taste to withdraw into the school-room. On the following day, Mrs. Daman made some slight protest, but Opal insisted that she was always happy at her studies.

Opal's 'studies' would hardly have enhanced her price in the educational market, though, when we are a little more improved, they may create a title to an academical degree. French novels which were happily Greek to the household, English novels with heroines as probable and respectable as the goddesses of heathen story. And, beyond these, excursions which were more ominous of evil nature than the fooleries of frankly vicious romance. Entwined with Opal's worldly, pliant temper was a strain as seemingly dissimilar and really kin as Indian ferocity is to Indian servility, a contradiction not unlike that which makes effeminate, dreamy Hamlet glut his hatred with imaginary carnage.

Shrinking from the smallest personal danger—shivering from the sight of a graveyard by night—scheming for the vulgarest enjoyment of wealth, Opal dabbled by stealth and half-afraid in readings

which, as she tried to persuade herself, gave promise of communion with disembodied spirits, or even—at a safe distance—with something worse. It would not have taken much to make her, in her heart, a serpent-worshipper or a deifier of the woman who brought knowledge into the world. The profane folly which has renewed, in a critical period of English civilisation, the grotesque blasphemies which sprang up around the youth of African Christianity had a mysterious charm for her. No doubt her Indian blood combined with her semi-education to make her an easy proselyte. The absence of precise expression or defined positions in a crotchet did not disgust her. But this was only a negative factor; there was something more. The gust of excitement which is said to have made the Israelitish wives powerful agents in the apostasy of their husbands, the *ennui* on which Comte counted as a spring of revolution, urged

her on. She gloated over pamphlets which promised, to a vague abstraction called 'woman,' emancipation from civil and even from social laws, and pleaded for a society in which the hysterical temper should rank above the coarse qualities of judgment and courage.

And with this dreamy mutiny cowardice was curiously though quite naturally mingled, a craven fear of the cold grave, an insane, almost epileptic horror at the thought of punishment beyond the grave. Opal's nearest approach to religious aspiration was a piteous hope that life might be eternally prolonged without the awful ordeal of a judgment-day, and that, if she must needs be better in order to be happy, she might grow better by some undefined process of development, spontaneously, as it were, and without submission of the will.

Meanwhile Opal was in the world, and life at that little bit of the world called

Avonuish was becoming almost intolerable to her. Her improved health made her feel more restless than ever. Inclination clashed with interest as it had done all her life. She knew that only perseverance in the dull straight line which she had marked out for herself could win the position she craved. Yet she sometimes felt tempted to throw over respectability with all its hindrances and start afresh as an adventuress confessed.

‘I won’t be an Aunt Sophy, come what may,’ she told herself, that lady being the last type of social failure which had come before her eyes. Her body stirred and her face flushed in a heat of revolt at the thought that Opal Carew might be doomed to pass through life without ease and pleasure, and the admiration which she thought her due. In the warm, well-lighted school-room, within sound of human voices, she found courage for a half wish that forbidden aid could be bought—of

course without danger. To the restraints of religion and morality, she applied in that moment something like the fallacy with which Romeo presses the price of his own death on his accessory,

‘The world is not thy friend nor the world’s law.’

In Opal’s exalted frame of mind a marriage with Jack, even if it could be compassed, sometimes seemed but a poor thing to aim at. Yet prudence told her that she might do worse than marry a man who was not only rich, but lively enough to seek amusement, and weak enough for a wife to do pretty well what she liked with him. To marry him, and make the parents’ home head-quarters, as Greta meant to do, would be dull enough; but to win Jack in a moment of pique, to divide him from his own people by a breach which could be made as wide as death itself, that would mean a very different sort of life.

Opal started from her dream. Jack was tapping at the French window.

‘You here!’ she exclaimed.

For a moment she almost connected his appearance with her half-conceived appeal to the mysterious influences with which in some of her imaginings she peopled the unseen world. Jack’s prosaic answer brought her down, or up, to everyday life.

‘Didn’t you know the governor wired?’

‘No, but I thought he didn’t seem quite himself to-day.’

‘There’s been a lot of bother since old Kent died. I don’t think I’m wanted really, but of course I came.’

‘Have you seen him?’

‘No, I wanted to get in without coming across Aunt Sophy.’

‘He’s in the dining-room asleep, I think.’

‘Then it’s no use going to him. Have they heard from Greta?’

‘Yes.’ Opal repeated the substance of the letter, with notes by Aunt Sophy.

‘What’s this?’ asked Jack, when this entertainment was over.

Opal had huddled away most of her literature, but Jack had captured one book, attracted by its paper back.

‘I’m obliged to read French sometimes to keep it up,’ explained Opal; ‘but I don’t think that’s quite the book for me, though I’ve only just glanced at it. I wish I had some one to guide me in my selection.’

‘I wish I could read French,’ said Jack, who was not, however, moved by any desire to direct Opal’s studies. ‘I suppose you can read it like English?’

‘Yes; I’ll read you a bit, if you like.’ And she read him a love-scene very glibly, but with some few omissions.

‘Isn’t that rather maudlin?’ remarked Jack, who would perhaps have found an unexpurgated edition less tame. ‘I like Marryatt and Guy Livingstone. I don’t mind a good murder, too.’

‘You’d like Gaboriau,’ said Opal; and she began giving him the outline of ‘Le Crime d’Orcival.’

‘I’m like the girl in the “Arabian Nights,”’ she thought, as she saw Jack listening with some interest. It must be confessed that he had also the solace of a pipe. As with Scheherezade, Opal’s story was broken off at a thrilling point.

‘I hear your father moving, you’d better catch him before he joins the others.’

Jack rushed out with the fear of Aunt Sophy before his eyes, and for the rest of the evening father and son were closeted together.

All next day Jack was supposed to be helping his father, but after dinner he made his way again to the school-room.

‘Aunt Sophy can’t bear smoke, I’m awfully sorry of course,’ he remarked; ‘won’t you come out in the garden?’

‘You’ll think me very silly,’ replied Opal, lowering her eyes, ‘but Miss Gay’ (such was Aunt Sophy’s inappropriate name) ‘is sure to say something unpleasant if she sees you walking with the governess.’

‘ Oh, it’s all right, they’ve got the blinds down.’

Walking about a garden on a damp spring evening was not so much to Opal’s taste as sitting in a warm room, but there was a spice more of romance about it, and she made no difficulties. But when Jack seemed to be enjoying himself she suddenly broke off.

‘ I must go in now.’

‘ They won’t look for us yet.’

‘ I don’t want them to look for us, for me at least.’

‘ You’re much more prudish than Greta.’

‘ Greta isn’t a governess; and I’m not your *fiancée*. But Greta is unconventional. If she wasn’t, I shouldn’t venture to walk about with her lover. Some girls wouldn’t like it.’

‘ Perhaps you think she doesn’t care enough about me to mind.’

‘ Oh, but she does care about you; she must.’

Then Opal ran away, and, except a demure good-night, she gave Jack no more conversation that evening.

In the after-dinner hour, when Mr. Daman slept in his chair and Bowwow in her bed, Jack now sought Opal as regularly as he smoked his pipe. Sometimes she summarised Gaboriau and Du Boisgobey for his benefit, sometimes he gave her elementary lessons in billiards. She never attempted to read him a love-scene again, but if he showed any inclination to rehearse one she threw no obstacles in the way.

Returning from Plymouth one afternoon, Jack found Bob Charlstrom sitting at tea. Having received a letter from home the young man came, thinking, as he said, that Mrs. Daman would like to hear the latest news of her daughter. The mother had replied rather inconsiderately that she heard from her daughter every day. Then Aunt Sophy pounced down on him and talked of the army, giving full biographies

of any men who had become personages by being known to herself. Bob did not look happy when Jack came in. But he sat on till the master of the house appeared. To see a man in his house and not ask him to dinner was an impossibility to Mr. Daman. He being fagged and worried, his invitation was perhaps less hearty than usual, but Bob Charlstrom stayed. He was rewarded by the sight of Opal across the dinner-table. She betook herself to the school-room afterwards, whilst the two young men strolled out with their pipes. Jack did not betray the secret of her hiding-place, but drove the visitor off to the station without even giving him a chance of wishing the governess good-bye.

Opal spent her evening alone, raging. If Jack had presented himself, he might have become acquainted with a new phase of her character. But, by the next evening, discretion had again secured the reins.

‘What did that fellow come for?’ asked Jack.

Opal smiled.

‘To bring news of Greta.’

‘Oh! that’s all humbug.’

‘You ought to be pleased at his coming, when he knew Greta was away.’

Opal had secretly resented Jack’s conclusion that Greta must always be the attraction.

‘Didn’t you think he admired Greta?’ was Jack’s next question.

‘Oh! yes, everyone must. But, perhaps he knew she was engaged?’

‘That he didn’t. Well, I’m sorry you didn’t see more of your admirer, Miss Carew.’

‘A governess is never supposed to have an admirer. She’s bound to act on the assumption that she’s old and ugly. Not that I care about Mr. Charlstrom. I suppose people would say I ought to take him with a curtsey, if he gave me the chance.

Well, I sometimes think, after all, that it may be as well for a girl not to marry a man she's too fond of; she becomes a slave.'

Manner, voice, expression, in which her whole frame bore part in a way impossible and almost unintelligible to Europeans, put the dots on the 'i's.' Jack must have been much denser than he was, if he had entertained a moment's doubt that Opal was the girl whose affection would be a slavery. He had never set up for a lady-killer. The girl he loved had done her best to keep him from any undue belief in himself. But he could not help thinking that he was a hero in the eyes of one woman. He began to find himself a much more dangerous fellow than he had supposed. The sudden call for discretion and magnanimity rather raised him in his own opinion. The more lightly he regarded his adversary, the more pliant he became in her strong, lissome, Oriental fingers. Reckon-

ing up her progress, she could tell herself that she had not wasted her time. Greta's return might, and probably would, break their extreme intimacy. 'But at least there is an understanding between us,' Opal told herself. 'I don't think I am only Brat's governess to him now.'

Poor Bowwow was Brat, in Opal's soliloquy. The pet names of her little pupils usually underwent some such transformation when she was out of temper.

CHAPTER XI.

GRETA had been asked to Lancaster Gate for a fortnight, and she had made up her mind not to stay a day longer. Jack had bound her by solemn promises, and he was quite capable of coming to fetch her, if she disappointed him. But, when the time came, she found it rather difficult to get away.

‘Stay till the week before Easter, we shall be going away ourselves then,’ pleaded Fred.

‘Stay! Why, of course she’ll stay. What should she go for?’ said the old general, who had only consented to her being asked at all on the condition that she should not stay long.

‘It’s a long way to come for such a short visit,’ said his wife, who forgot that the way had not grown longer since they sent their invitation.

‘Greta won’t care to stay after Arundel’s gone,’ said Maud; then added, apologetically, ‘We shall be so dull.’

‘That’s just like Maud,’ said Fred, when she got Greta alone, ‘she’s jealous of you now, she’s always been jealous of me. I’m never jealous of anyone; I don’t know what it means. But Edith was just like Maud.’

‘I’ve been afraid to ask about poor Edith,’ said Greta; ‘but, since I’ve got to know you all, I’ve often wondered what she was like.’

‘She was rather like Maud to look at, only on a smaller scale. I hardly know how to describe her in other respects. I think she was rather like other people; I mean there was nothing original about her.’

‘I can’t understand her falling in love with Captain Mace.’

‘I don’t know that she did fall in love exactly ; she liked him very much, as we all did. It was a good match, too, and everybody wished it. Edith wasn’t romantic like me. It all came about by degrees. Arundel used to be here a great deal ; he had no mother or sisters of his own, and he and Bob were chums. They coached for their exam. together, only Bob didn’t pass that time. People said that Arundel must be engaged to one of us ; they usually picked out Edith, because she was the middle one, I suppose. I think the Pater spoke to him about it at last.’

‘Just like him,’ thought Greta, as she pictured Arundel making lazy love to all the three girls, and holding out his sceptre to one when the father interfered, instead of falling headlong in love, as a man ought to do. She supposed he thought any girl would be pleased to take him because he

was 'a good match.' Greta hated the expression. Aunt Sophy had once used it in speaking of Greta's own engagement, and, in answer to the girl's indignant protest, had declared that if it made no difference to Greta herself, it made all the difference to her mother.

Anything which seemed mean or sordid offended Greta morally, much as suffering or cruelty affected her physically. They were amongst the ugly things of life to which she would fain shut her eyes. Her instinctive avoidance of such subjects had been fostered by the old-fashioned comfortable class of people with whom her lot had been cast. But Greta's new friend was too modern to be nice in the pursuit of exciting topics. With horror, but some admiration, Greta heard Fred discuss with Arundel the life of Bethnal Green. Had she received the least encouragement, Fred might have made Greta open her eyes still wider.

‘Of course, as a Liberal, you know all about it,’ remarked Arundel to Greta, when some involuntary shudder had betrayed her disgust. ‘Under a republic, you know, London would be all West-end.’

‘I know nothing about it, and I don’t want to,’ replied Greta, pettishly. ‘I don’t live in London ; I couldn’t help these poor people if I would. Why should I make myself miserable thinking about them ? What good does it do ?’

‘None at all that I can see,’ returned Arundel. ‘I’m rather in favour of girls letting these things alone myself.’

‘Oh ! I call that selfish,’ said Fred, who felt herself a real worker. She had once undertaken a class in Whitechapel, but her ministrations had been cut short by her father. ‘Don’t you take any interest in your own poor, Greta ?’

‘There are so few of them, and they’re not so very badly off,’ said Greta, thinking almost with shame of the bottles of

port, the pounds of tea, and other creature comforts which brought such a ready return of thanks and love from her poor people at home.

‘I think we ought to develop our sympathies,’ observed Fred; ‘if you don’t find misery at home, it’s all the more reason why you should seek it abroad. I can’t understand a strong healthy girl like you, Greta, being so squeamish that you can’t even go over a hospital.’

‘Miss Charlstrom has fed on the roses and lain in the lilies of life,’ remarked Arundel. ‘Did you propose Guy’s or Bedlam as a gentle breaking-up of the fallow ground, Fred? I know they are the sort of places where you go to spend a happy day.’

‘Well, I thought Greta might like to see our institutions, especially as there isn’t much going on just now.’

‘Why, my visit has been one round of wild dissipation,’ cried Greta; ‘you don’t

know what my life at home is like. You must come and stay with us in the summer, Fred, and then I'll introduce you to all my nice comfortable poor people.'

'Will you introduce me too, Miss Charlstrom, if Bob and I make a tour in the west?'

'To jest a fortnight in a hospital,' cried Fred; 'but you're coming with us, Arundel, and Bob too. We can't make our first tramp abroad without our men.'

'I'm sure you're quite above needing our help.'

'Oh, as to that I could travel all over the world alone. But I can't go mountaineering by myself, at least the Pater wouldn't let me. And he's not fond of promiscuous acquaintances. If Maud could only walk like Greta, I should be all right.'

'I wonder you don't take your cousin abroad with you,' remarked Arundel to Fred a little later.

‘It wouldn’t be a bad move, but I’m not sure that the Pater would see it. It’s something new for us to go at all.’

‘It would be a great thing for you to have Greta, as Bob and I couldn’t be there all the time,’ said Arundel, very disingenuously.

‘Oh, I should like it well enough ; she suits me down to the ground.’

Arundel left that night, and even Greta was obliged to confess that she missed him. With the exception of Fred, the Charlstroms were not a lively family, and Fred was less amusing when she had no one to contradict her. When Greta had to bid her friends good-bye a day or two later, she felt less dull at leaving than she had expected.

Sitting in the train, thinking over her visit and wondering that a fortnight could seem so long to look back upon, Greta scarcely noticed the stoppage at Swindon. She was quite taken by surprise when Jack came rushing along the platform.

‘Didn’t you know I should meet you?’ he asked, jumping in breathless.

‘I thought you might, but I hadn’t begun to look out for you yet.’

There was a final rush for seats, and an old lady was thrust into their carriage. In spite of Jack’s murderous glances, she held her place till they reached Plymouth. She even ventured to address a little conversation to Greta, who was as gracious as her lover was sulky.

‘How she must pity me if she guesses the state of things,’ exclaimed Greta when they found themselves alone.

‘Blow me up, do, I’ve not been blown up for a fortnight,’ returned Jack.

‘Poor thing, has it had no one to keep it in the right way!’

If Jack winced, it was imperceptibly. His delight at having Greta back was too great to be marred by the shadow of a secret. But he perhaps half regretted the gorilla.

Having satisfied himself by a strict cross-examination that Greta had scarcely spoken to any man except the old general, Captain Mace, whom he knew she disliked, and his father whom the young lover may have thought safe, Jack took no interest in Greta's experiences.

Mrs. Daman made a better listener, but even she was unsympathetic. Her feelings towards her first husband's relations were as unfriendly as ever, whilst Greta had pretty well forgotten that she had ever regarded them as enemies. The recollection of chill welcome had been effaced by the more recent recollection of a warm farewell. But it had made a deep impression on Mrs. Daman's mind. All Greta's assurances that her friends had pressed her to stay longer were less convincing than the fact that she had, as Aunt Sophy said she would, returned to the day.

If Greta's family had wished to make

her a partisan of the Charlstroms, they could scarcely have gone better to work. Mrs. Daman's attitude of jealous suspicion, Aunt Sophy's frank spitefulness, and Jack's contemptuous indifference, all provoked Greta to defend her friends with something like the warmth of family feeling. She had half resented the Charlstroms' habit of speaking as if she were one of themselves, and had set her face against any exclusive appropriation of herself. But she was not inclined to make one of a party against them, especially when that party was headed by Aunt Sophy. Greta thought that this sole representative of her mother's side of the family was certainly inferior to her father's people, and she did not wonder that they had never taken kindly to her. It would be like Aunt Sophy to put herself forward and overshadow her sister. Before Mr. Daman came on the scene, Aunt Sophy had been the widow's one friend and counsellor.

Greta had often heard her aunt relate how she had made overtures on her sister's behalf which the Charlstroms had not received in a right spirit. Greta wondered now what the Charlstrom version of that story might be.

‘When is Aunt Sophy going?’ she asked her mother impatiently, a few days after her return.

‘I don’t know; she is not going back to Bournemouth, she talks of looking out for something near us.’

‘There’s nothing for her, thank goodness. But it’s a dreadful thing to get a homeless person into your house. Everything seems out of joint now Aunt Sophy’s here.’

‘It’s not poor Aunt Sophy. Father’s worried and Jack’s taken up, that’s why things seem uncomfortable.’

‘It’s horrid, nothing but shop all day long and shop talk at night. What’s the

good of so much bother? It's sure to come all right.'

Mrs. Daman shook her head doubtfully.

'It's bad enough to find you and father full of business,' continued Greta, 'but it's much worse when Jack can talk of nothing else.'

In spite of Greta's distaste for business, Jack tried to consult her about his affairs.

'I'm letting myself in for lots of liabilities,' he remarked; 'it's your affair as much as mine, but I suppose you don't mind.'

'I should think not; I know nothing about money and I don't want to, only I wish there wasn't all this talk about it.'

Jack smiled with the superior wisdom of a business man. As a future capitalist, he felt himself master of the situation.

Greta did not praise him or call him his father's good genius, as Opal did. Jack scarcely knew how it was that the little

governess found opportunities of offering her tribute, for he rather kept out of her way now. But he could not be unconscious of her devotion. Everyone noticed that Opal seemed out of spirits. Greta declared that she must be suffering under the depressing influence of Aunt Sophy, whilst Mrs. Daman supposed that the governess foresaw difficulties to herself in the danger which threatened the family fortunes. To Jack it was an open secret. Opal did not care to dissemble ; it was part of her game now to play with her cards on the table.

In a few months everything would be over, and, whether victorious or defeated, Opal had made up her mind to find a new field. It was only by assuring herself that the present state of things would not be for long, that Opal just managed to endure the level life, her native restlessness, and the non-arrival of the fairy prince. Any hopes which had been raised by Bob

Charlstrom's visit were speedily overthrown. He only called once more—to bid good-bye. It chanced that Opal had taken Bowwow that day to a tea-party at the rectory. If anything had been wanting to confirm Opal's distaste for the church, it would have become a rooted aversion from that hour.

CHAPTER XII.

“KEEP Zulu and Fluff shut up; some dogs at Dr. Hardy’s have been bitten,” was Jack’s parting injunction as he left one morning for Plymouth.

Bright summer days had come, but Jack was still almost as regular in attendance at business as his father.

“I believe you like it,” said Greta, who felt rather like the little boy in the nursery story who wanted the pretty horse to play with him.

“I like play better, everyone does,” replied Jack, who nevertheless found some excitement in his new calling.

Perhaps the ways of home-life were less

smooth to him than they had been a year ago. He had not felt the same necessity for wary walking in the days when personal beauty was not found indispensable for Bowwow's governess.

'I must look after things myself,' Jack went on, 'the governor's not what he was.'

'He's not an old man yet, and I'm sure he works hard enough.'

'Hard enough to knock him up, at all events.'

'Oh, as for his falling asleep after dinner, lots of people do that.'

'But the governor never did till lately.'

'Do you mean——' Greta stopped short indignantly.

'What Aunt Sophy kindly hints? I'm not prepared to go so far as that.'

For Aunt Sophy was supposed by inuendoes to convey a suspicion that Mr. Daman showed undue appreciation of his own wares.

'But,' Jack went on, 'I don't think it's

good for a man of his age to drop walking and take to sleeping all the evening in his chair. And if Aunt Sophy could see how little he eats in the day, and how he keeps himself up by nips, she might have some remarks to make.'

'He was all right in the winter; he used to walk home from the station wet or fine. You hadn't the dog-cart then.'

'It doesn't make any difference; he'd take Jackson's old trap if there wasn't the dog-cart.'

'It's not been a nice year,' remarked Greta, meditatively, 'it began with this bother.'

'It began with the Olivers' ball, which we enjoyed immensely.'

'So we did, but we've had nothing nice since. I believe that dagger brought ill luck after all.'

'It didn't do us the only ill turn I care about; I took it away in time to prevent that.'

‘You’re as bad as Opal, you can’t think how superstitious she is. I’m afraid she’s infecting Bowwow.’

‘I always said she was rather weird; but I must be off.’

Jack started, then suddenly remembered about the dogs and ran in to give his directions.

Mrs. Daman looked rather alarmed.

‘Perhaps Bowwow had better not go out,’ she began.

‘Oh, she’d get out of the way fast enough,’ returned Greta; ‘the dogs wouldn’t, so I suppose they must be shut up, poor things.’

‘I’m going to tea with Mrs. Mol; you said Ellen should take me,’ cried Bowwow, speaking with much more decision than her mother.

‘Greta never sees any danger, do you think it safe for Bowwow to go?’ asked Mrs. Daman, appealing to Opal.

‘Oh, yes,’ promptly replied the governess,

who had been looking forward to a quiet afternoon, 'the dog is most likely killed by this time or else miles away.'

'Well, I must tell Ellen to be very careful and give all dogs a wide berth. I know it's no use trying to keep you in, Greta.'

'I'm going straight into the lion's mouth, literally to the dogs, as it happens. I'm to lunch with the Greens, and I must pass Dr. Hardy's on the way. His dogs will run out and bite me, no doubt, but I'll get him to cauterise me on the spot. You'll see me back early, Jack promised to get away in time for a ride. Keep the poker hot in case of accidents,' added Greta, as she ran away to get her hat.

Opal got rid of Bowwow early in the afternoon and immediately settled herself down to the enjoyment of a French novel. She was leaning back in a delightfully easy chair, trying to realise the edifying fancies of the author, when Mrs. Daman's good-natured voice broke in upon her.

‘I’ve only this minute remembered that I promised to send Mrs. Barber the *Temple Bar*. Would you mind just taking it round for me?’

Opal’s first impulse was to refuse, but she felt that she had cut away the ground beneath her feet. How could she plead fear of the mad dog, when she had declared the roads to be safe for Bowwow? Yet it was agony to her to go out. With a sinking heart she put on her hat, and, selecting the stoutest umbrella she could find, prepared to leave the safe shelter of four walls.

‘You may meet Greta,’ said Mrs. Daman. This was not reassuring, since Greta had declared her own road to be the very high way of danger.

Opal had little more than half-a-mile to walk. The road along which her way took her was narrow and stony, enclosed by the usual high hedges. Dead loneliness prevailed. There was no cottage except one, empty and ruinous, in which a man

was said to have murdered his wife. It enjoyed the reputation, unusual to so poor an abode, of being haunted. There was little to alarm the most imaginative in its appearance now, under the bright summer sun. But Opal's nerves were all quivering. She drew herself together as she turned the corner where the cottage stood, and seemed to feel the realisation of a horrible dream when she saw in the midst of the narrow road, which lay before her, but one object, a dog tearing as it seemed straight at her. With a shriek, which was almost a yell, Opal turned and rushed back, at a speed which would have seemed impossible to her in calmer moments. Half blind with fright, she clutched at something which advanced swiftly from the other side.

‘The mad dog,’ she gasped, recognising Jack, with a spasm of relief.

Opal's breath lasted till she had got behind him, but she could run no farther. She

saw Jack dodging from side to side to bar the animal's access to her. But the quickest man is slow compared with a dog. With a moan Opal saw it passing on his left when he stooped and caught it by the skin of the back. The dog writhed round and snapped. Jack dashed it down with all his force upon the rocky ground, and before it could rise again, crushed the life out of it with one desperate stamp.

So furious was Opal's greed of safety that the crunch of the little dog's ribs, which would have sickened her at any other time, brought only a delightful sense of salvation. She even felt some fleeting resentment at the air of compunction with which Jack looked down at his work.

'He didn't bite you, did he?' asked Jack.

'No. Oh, he has bitten you,' cried Opal, as she saw a narrow streak of blood stealing down the back of her preserver's hand. 'Do have it cauterised,' she cried, excitedly.

‘Don’t get frightened, whatever you do,’ replied Jack, in an airy manner, turning up his sleeve and discovering a little ragged wound about an inch above the wrist. Then, drawing a silver case from his pocket, he struck a vesuvian, and, before Opal knew what he was about, had cauterised the wound in a rough and ready fashion.

‘Phew! if that doesn’t make it all right, I don’t know what will. Now, just hold your tongue about this, there’s a good girl, I don’t want to frighten mother or to tell Greta that I’ve committed a murder, and, by Jove, fancy Aunt Sophy pressing cold water on me at every meal. Did the beast fly at you?’

‘Yes, but I ran away directly.’

‘I don’t think it can be the dog they talked about, they said he was black.’ It was a dirty white dog which lay stretched at their feet. ‘What made you think he was mad?’

‘He looked so wild and strange. See how savagely he bit you too.’

‘Well, I attacked him first. I’ll tell you what, Miss Carew, we’d better hide the corpse and keep our own counsel. I’m afraid I’ve killed nothing but a harmless necessary dog after all.’

‘Afraid!’

‘Well, I might feel myself a public benefactor if I’d killed the dog there was all the scare about. I’m not much afraid of hydrophobia myself, I believe it’s fancy half the time. But I don’t want my symptoms watched; if you should see any signs of eccentricity you needn’t try to account for them. There,’ said Jack, as he heaved his victim over the hedge, ‘they’ll think the keepers killed him if he’s found. Let’s hope he was a poacher. I must go and meet Greta. What a jolly good thing she didn’t arrive in time to see this deed of blood.’

‘My book, I must leave my book,’ said Opal, still fluttered and incoherent, ‘it’s

for Mrs. Barber,' she explained, hoping that Jack would offer to leave it, as he did.

'You'd better get home, you look quite knocked up,' he remarked, as he ran off. Then he turned round once more to shout a parting warning. 'Mind you hold your tongue.'

Opal thought of nothing but her own safety till she got home. If Jack had not killed the right dog, it was still at large. She felt that the sight of a black dog would kill her outright, but she put no confidence in dogs of any colour, they might all be infected like the one that had just bitten Jack. She scouted the idea that her late enemy was harmless.

The house was reached at last, and Opal, still tremulous as if she had risen from a sick bed, crept back to the safe refuge of the school-room. Her chair and her book were just as she had left them. But the novel had lost its charm, the excitement of her own adventure was too strong to leave

room for fictitious excitement. The whole scene passed before Opal as she luxuriated in her present security. Reviewing her experience, she discovered that she had failed to make use of a good situation. She had never even thanked her deliverer. She had expressed no regret that he should be wounded in her service. She had displayed no pity for the self-inflicted pain of which she really did think with an honest shiver. She had been insensible to everything but a feeling of satisfaction at not finding herself the sufferer, and she feared that the feeling had been genuine enough to betray itself. Opal did not want Jack to think her selfish, especially as she had never felt so warmly towards him as at this moment. Physical courage was, she told herself, the one quality worthy of worship. She thought with a sort of longing how safely she could go through life with such a protector as Jack. He was wasted on Greta, who was herself foolhardy.

With a rush of admiration for Jack, and a desire to reinstate herself in his opinion, Opal seized note-paper. He had told her not to speak on the subject, but he could not be angry with her for writing to thank him.

After some deliberation, Opal turned out rather a clever little note, such as most men would be pleased to receive from a pretty woman. She was obliged to deliver it herself, and she had to watch all the evening for an opportunity.

‘Please read this, I’ll never say another word,’ she murmured, standing before him with downcast eyes and looking like a model for Queen Esther.

‘You little silly, to make a fuss about nothing, the poor beast was as sane as you or I,’ laughed Jack.

But this detracted nothing from Jack’s glory in Opal’s eyes, since he had certainly faced and killed the dog on the faith of the bad name which she had given it.

CHAPTER XIII.

‘ Oh, dear, what a horribly dull summer we’re having, how I wish something would happen for a change,’ said Greta, as she came through the French window into the drawing-room, casting a longing look back at the empty tennis-court.

‘ Turn your hand to something useful, I’m sure you’d find that change enough,’ replied Aunt Sophy, who was sitting alone with a huge work basket at her side. ‘ Try to make your own trousseau. Do as I did when I was a girl, I never found the time hang heavy.’

‘ Did every girl make herself a trousseau, when you were young?’ asked Greta, with an air of surprise.

‘If I didn’t make one for myself, I made both your mother’s. And I’m making yours now,’ returned Aunt Sophy, holding up an imposing display of tucks and feather-stitching. ‘Not but what I might have had plenty of trousseaus for myself if I liked.’

‘What a female Bluebeard!’

‘Well, I daresay I’ve had more lovers than you have.’

‘You couldn’t well have less. Jack is my sole captive. Do you think if I lived as long, I might have as many as you, Aunt Sophy?’

‘Girls usen’t to snap at their first offer, at all events.’

‘Not if they liked the man? I call that silly.’

‘But you’re quite right to marry whilst you can. I used to think you were throwing yourself away on Jack——’

‘But you see there’s more in him than you fancied,’ cried Greta, eagerly.

‘Perhaps I do, but that’s not quite what I meant. You’ve been petted and cockered up in extravagant ways till you’d make but a poor hand at living on small means; and that’s what you’d very soon come to, if it wasn’t for Jack. My poor sister thought she was doing a fine thing for herself when she married Mr. Daman.’

‘And so she was—if we were beggars to-morrow! What can a man do more than make his wife happy? Whether he makes her rich or poor is mostly a matter of chance. Men aren’t poor by choice.’

‘Well, it’s a lucky chance for you that the man you’re going to marry will make you rich. But you’re not married yet. There’s many a slip. Take care that little governess doesn’t wheedle your lover away from you, she’s trying hard enough.’

For a moment Greta remained speechless with astonishment. Then she burst out indignantly,

‘How cruel, poor little Opal!’

Aunt Sophy started up as she saw Bowwow run past the window with a plate in her hand, the maid beside her carrying a light table.

‘They’re never going to lay tea in the garden, I should get my death of cold. Ellen,’ she shouted.

‘Never mind her, don’t hear her,’ said wicked little Bowwow. But Ellen stopped short.

‘It’s been raining all the morning,’ observed Miss Gay, ‘no one but a child would think of sitting out on the grass. And little girls were not allowed to order the household in my time,’ she added, severely.

‘They were seen not heard, weren’t they,’ said Greta, ‘but you know that’s not the way to make girls fit for the franchise.’

Female suffrage represented the sun in Aunt Sophy’s political system.

As Ellen began setting out tea in the

drawing-room, Bowwow hastened to illustrate the higher education of children by throwing her plate of cakes on the floor and herself after it.

‘We always have tea in the garden, we hate tea in the nasty stuffy old house, no one wants it but Aunt Sophy,’ she cried, passionately.

‘I’m shocked,’ said Mrs. Daman, coming in and finding her mutinous offspring on the floor.

Bowwow lifted a ruffled head and pink face from the carpet.

‘It’s all her fault,’ pointing the finger of scorn at her aunt.

The mother felt secretly proud of her pretty little rebel, and wondered why she was blessed with such high-spirited children. But she made a very creditable pretence of displeasure. Bowwow was banished to the school-room and sentenced to have no tea at all.

Aunt Sophy was magnanimous enough to

intercede for her. She was rather fond of Bowwow, as she had been fond of Greta at the same early age. The poor lady would have liked her niece still, if she had found her friendship met half-way, but to give all and expect nothing in return from ungrateful exacting youth, requires more philosophy or christianity than she had attained to. Bowwow did not quite like being forgiven. The spirit of revolt was strong within her. She would not take the cake offered by Aunt Sophy, but insisted on helping herself to bread and butter.

Greta felt hurt at the child's ungraciousness, though it simply reflected her own. With some compunction she saw Aunt Sophy preparing to resume her thankless task.

'It's very good of you to slave over my work, but I wish you wouldn't,' she remarked. 'Mother, why do you let her? There's plenty of time for my poor people to do it all.'

‘Your poor people would have to be paid, and there are some things which shouldn’t come out of Jack’s pocket,’ replied her aunt. Then turning to Mrs. Daman she went on, ‘I’ve been telling Greta I wish she’d do some of it herself. She won’t believe me when I say there’s nothing like useful occupation.’

‘Satan and idle hands,’ said Greta, good-humouredly.

‘Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do.’ It was Bowwow who supplied the quotation, being instigated by Opal, who liked to trot out her pupil.

‘Hum,’ muttered Aunt Sophy, ‘and pray what do you know about Satan?’

‘Satan’s the devil,’ replied Bowwow, gravely. ‘I like the devil.’

Mother and governess stared aghast. Aunt Sophy alone retained presence of mind to ask, ‘Why?’

‘Because he likes naughty people,’ replied Bowwow, promptly. ‘When I’m naughty

no one loves me but the devil, and so I love him.'

Comment on Bowwow's original theology was cut short by Ellen throwing open the door and announcing 'Miss Charlstrom.' Fred came in with her usual little rush of laughing and chatter. Apologising for all short-comings as a correspondent she hastened to make up for deficiencies by pouring out all her news, past, present, and future. She was staying at Mutley, but the family were at Baden taking baths for gout—at least the general was taking baths, the others were drinking the waters because they liked physicking. Fred had no gout, and no ailments real or fancied, but she would have gone to Baden with the others only she had been kept in town by her publisher, waiting for proofs which it seemed she had not got after all. She was going to Baden next week, the medical course would be over then, and they were to start on their travels. She had rushed

down to Plymouth to remind Greta of her promise to go with them. Fred fairly carried Mrs. Daman by storm, riding down all objections and taking consent for granted. As for Greta's assurances that, however delightful the idea might be, it was quite new to her, Fred repudiated them in perfect good faith. The idea was not new to herself, she had talked it over in the spring, and who could she have talked it over with but Greta?

When Fred had whirled herself away, promising to come early to-morrow and make arrangements, the others fell upon Greta, asking why she had sprung this mine upon them, and wondering what Jack would say.

'I'll make it all right if you'll only let me tell him myself,' said Greta, 'but indeed I never heard a word about it till to-day.'

Mrs. Daman was pleased and excited over any amusement for Greta, but Aunt

Sophy, though she allowed that it would be a good thing to cure her fidgets, threw a little cold water on the arrangement. She glanced significantly at Opal, who was holding forth on the delights of foreign travel and its beneficial effect on the health. As Greta's health was perfect, this seemed scarcely to the purpose. Opal perhaps over-did her part in her eagerness to get Jack all to herself for a month. It seemed the first step towards getting him to herself for life. Her scheme was no longer a mere question of self-interest. Since the moment when Jack had rescued her, something new had come into Opal's life. Hitherto nothing outside herself had had power to stir any active emotion in her breast.

Bewildered by the experience of a life which was no longer wholly self-centred, Opal believed herself to love with the desperate force of which she had heard and read. Such affection as it was in her

nature to give, she did give, fiercely and recklessly. Passions, which had lain dormant, tortured her like the evil spirits which she had wished to invoke. The rage of impotent hatred, the fury of unheeded jealousy, were drawing out all that was tigerish, and worse, in Opal's disposition. Centuries of christianity and western civilization had gone to purify the source from which Opal drew the larger part of her complex nature. Hitherto the alien current had run in greater part harmless, never mingling with the wider stream. Now it threatened to become a flood. Opal, tempted often to committed her fate to the worst and wildest part of her nature, had yielded at last. The mysterious personality which must either dictate or crouch to the different emotions, composing that which seems to be oneself, had abdicated its command. If Opal had ever resisted the evil impulses of her passionate self-indulgence, she refused to resist them now.

The crisis and its end were as yet invisible, or partially visible, to one alone. To most of those about the girl, insight into such a character as Opal's was impossible. Miss Gay had neither Greta's innocence nor Mrs. Daman's simplicity. She preached distrust, but an ungracious person is seldom a successful preacher. Greta turned a deaf ear to Aunt Sophy's warning. Deceit and disloyalty had no real place in her imagination. She believed Miss Gay's suspicions to be merely the reflection of ill will. Her only care was to coax Jack into yielding graciously to her own wishes. She meant to go with Fred in any case, but she wanted to go with her lover's goodwill. Jack came home in such high spirits that it seemed almost cruel to dash them. But Greta could never bear to wait. Even when she saw unpleasantness before her, she hurried to get it over.

'I've got something to tell you,' she began directly.

‘And I’ve got something to tell you,’ replied Jack.

‘Me first,’ cried Greta, quoting a childish expression which had been appropriated by her in the days when her domineering instincts first displayed themselves before an admiring family. Then she told him her plan, adding an entreaty that he would not spoil her pleasure. ‘It’s the last time I shall go away as a spinster and the last favour I shall ask you,’ she pleaded. ‘Of course he was rusty at first,’ she told her mother afterwards, ‘but he was very good on the whole. And I’ve promised to marry him a month sooner, the day after he comes of age, if he likes. He’s going to tell me all about the business after dinner, and I’ve pledged myself to listen for once. I’m rather glad he’s got his dear shop to amuse him whilst I’m away.’

Walking up and down the old garden, under the shadow of the grey church

tower, Jack unfolded his last news from the 'dear shop.'

'I say, Greta, didn't you always suppose that poor old Kent and the governor were partners?'

'Yes, of course, Daman and Kent.'

'Yes, Daman and Kent, but it's Scrooge and Marley. It was our old Kent's father who was the partner, he was the Kent whose name is over the shop. Our old Kent only lent the money, they say, at least that's what his people are trying to make out.'

'I suppose father has to pay it back again all the same.'

'Oh, yes, but it makes a lot of difference in one way. If it's a loan, and we can't pay everybody at once, Kent's heirs will share with the other creditors. If he was a partner, the other creditors will have his property to fall upon when they've devoured ours.'

Greta's resolution to be a patient listener broke down again.

‘ You talk as if we were paupers, I thought we were well off.’

‘ It’s wonderful with how little capital a business can be carried on ; still I admit I didn’t know how close we were sailing to the wind till I had to look into it. I suppose the governor thought Kent was good for years. Well, it comes to this: of course I’d do anything for the governor, if you don’t mind.’

‘ Of course I don’t mind.’

‘ But unluckily my promise isn’t worth twopence because I’m not of age. That cad Simpson had the cheek to tell me that I might get him to wait, and then, as soon as I was twenty-one, take off my hat to him. I told him I wasn’t a thief, whatever he might be, but that didn’t help matters much. In fact, if either side saw their way clear, they wouldn’t look at me. But luckily they are both in a fog. We’ve had opinions from London. One tremendous swell named Copeland calls it a partnership,

and another tremendous swell says the other thing. Both sides know that I'm good for twenty shilings in the pound, so they both consent to postpone operations on the chance of my not being a swindler. I've got them in a corner,' said Jack, triumphantly, as if the intricacies of the law had been his own invention for this particular emergency. 'I've been all the morning putting my name to papers which will make capital pipelights if I go off the hooks before November. The last dodge is that I shall be a partner because some think that it will give them a better hold on me. Others say it's no good unless I tell a lot of lies about my age, and that I shall have to promise everything all over again. That's what the lawyers are puzzling out now, I suppose, whether they can get on without the lies. I don't see that lawyers know the law any better than you do, they only know where to look for it. I'm game for anything bar swindling. Only, if it doesn't

work, you won't be so well off, I'm afraid.'

'Oh we shall do well enough, I dare say.'

'We shan't starve. I think it would be rather a lark to turn the shop into a public. Let's tell Aunt Sophy so. How should you like to be a barmaid? "The Greta's Arms." Stand at the door and say, "Come to my arms!"'

'In my Manola's dress! But I say, Jack, seriously, you're not going to be tied up all your life, are you?'

'Oh, dear no, when things are once set straight, I shall only be a sort of sleeping partner, I hope, if I'm obliged to be a partner at all. We needn't give up our travels, though you are going to take the edge off your enjoyment by going without me.'

'I shall only whet my appetite. And you'll settle all these weighty matters ever so much better without me to try and idle

you. Don't you know that I go about all day singing,

“ Oh, call my brother back to me, I cannot play alone.”

‘That’s a cheerful poem,’ remarked Jack, ‘there wasn’t much chance of getting that brother back again, if I remember rightly.’

CHAPTER XIV.

THE promised delight had come, after seven eagerly counted days. The channel passage was already only a bright memory. Through a stormy summer night, the train was rushing towards the German frontier. In a *coupé-lit* the two girls slept soundly, regardless of rain beating against the windows, or flashes of lightning which lit up the compartment more brightly than it would have been lit by the lamp which they had carefully shrouded.

Fred reposed comfortably on the cushions and soft pillows with a railway-rug wrapped round her. Greta lay full length on the floor, a travelling-bag offering an uneasy support to her head. She slumbered like a

baby till disturbed by a sudden dream that the door had given way and she was falling out on the line. Starting up in a fright, she found that the door had really given way to admit a man with a lantern, who stood at her head addressing her peremptorily in an unknown tongue. Hatless and bootless, with ruffled head and flushed face, Greta confronted him, indignant at this invasion. The commissionaire who had installed them in their snug *coupé-lit* had promised unbroken rest till morning. But remonstrance offers no satisfaction when you find yourself for all practical purposes dumb. Greta appealed to Fred who was just wakening to a consciousness of the situation.

‘He wants us to get out,’ explained Fred, with a disgusted glance at the wet platform, ‘they’re going to examine the small baggages.’

‘Why, it wasn’t to be for hours yet,’ said Greta, showing her watch.

‘That’s for the heavy luggage. There appear to be two examinations.’

Fred jumped out as she spoke, seeing her precious bag, Greta’s late pillow, in strange hands. Greta hastily pressed her small properties on the intruder.

‘He’s got all the things, he seems to want me as well. Tell him I can’t find my boot,’ she cried, after her companion. But Fred was hurrying away to find shelter. Greta’s persecutor, deciding that he could scarcely pull a lady out of the carriage, shut the door with a slam and departed. Still searching wildly under the seat for a boot which naturally appeared directly it was not wanted, Greta found herself the sole inmate of the train, which was speedily shunted into a siding. ‘They’re never going to leave this bit of train behind,’ she thought.

Even the prospect of being left till morning at some obscure station in a strange land failed to damp Greta’s high spirits. She laughed aloud as she surveyed

her dishevelled hair in the little glass.

‘Crazy Jane,’ she said, apostrophising herself, ‘they’ll clap you in the nearest asylum when you begin gibbering in vain attempts to explain yourself.’

By the time Greta had smoothed and twisted her hair as best she could, and buttoned her boots with a stray hairpin, the train began to move slowly back again. The lighted station full of little figures, moving to and fro, came in sight. Men with travelling caps tied over their ears and women with little hoods tied round pale sleepy faces, all with hands full of bags and baskets, scampered through the rain seeking their places which had no familiar packages left in them to guide their owners.

‘We don’t look pretty when we are called up in the middle of the night,’ thought Greta, offering a striking contradiction of her own theory as she put out her head and beckoned to her cousin. Fred had found some one to carry her bags; she was

gesticulating wildly; so was her companion. Greta inferred that the German language wanted a good deal of action to help it out.

‘We shall become proficient in Dumb Crambo,’ she remarked, as they composed themselves once more to sleep, with ill-grounded hopes of a night’s rest. But the dawn of a summer morning reconciled them to an enforced early rising. Fred dozed at intervals, but Greta sat up wide awake, unwilling to miss anything from the moment she could see out of the window. The country did not look quite so strange as she could have wished, even the flowers on the banks were familiar friends. As the morning advanced and the stations filled with people, Greta looked vainly for quaint costumes. She pounced on a curiously thick sandwich, but found raw ham too striking a novelty to be agreeable.

The day was chiefly passed in a railway carriage. About midday came a halt at

the junction where they expected to meet their friends from Baden. Leaving Greta in charge of the baggage, Fred undertook to find out all about trains. Whilst she was vainly exercising such fluency in German as an English education had given her, Greta, encamped on the platform, addressed all the most good-natured looking of her fellow-travellers till she found one able and willing to interpret for her.

The train from Baden was in, there was no other for hours. On further inquiry they discovered a telegram addressed to Fred.

'Go straight to the Waldhof at Waldberg. Rooms engaged. Will join you to-morrow.'

Greta's friend, who turned out to be an English-speaking German, instead of a German-speaking Englishman, as she had supposed, gave the girls full instructions as to their route. He furnished Greta with a few phrases which she had worked pretty hard before the journey was accom-

plished. Fred's confidence in her own powers was unshaken, but Greta insisted that they would never have reached Waldberg if it had not been for the good-natured German friend and her own variations on the world *schlagen*. It was not an easy place to get to, and the difficulty of approaching it seemed to increase as they drew nearer. Darkness was falling when they at last found themselves on the single line which led through the Black Forest to their destination. There was a rush when they reached the little station. People who had been all day fighting for seats and struggling over luggage were getting rather short-tempered. Having found that porters were not at their call here, as at home, Fred and Greta seized their bags and squeezed themselves into the last corner of the Waldhof omnibus. A stout commissionaire barred the way against the little crowd pressing after them and proceeded to take an inventory of his cargo.

This resulted in the summary ejection of one young man who had neglected the indispensable telegram. Then they began to climb slowly uphill in the darkness. They could see lights here and there, showing glimpses of a miserable-looking village.

‘It doesn’t look much of a place,’ remarked Fred, peering through the window.

‘It looks horrid,’ would have been Greta’s honest profession, but she was not going to let herself own that the Black Forest could be anything but enchanting. Though even the Black Forest was only the gate to Switzerland, the real land of her dreams.

As the omnibus climbed higher, flashes of electric light shone through the trees.

‘The Waldhof!’ cried one. ‘The waterfall!’ cried another. ‘Was that a rocket?’ as there came a whiz and a flash.

‘A dirty village and the Crystal Palace,’ observed Fred, in a low voice. ‘I don’t think we shall want to stay here long.’

● ‘Isn’t it stifling?’ asked Greta.

She had been obliged to shut the window, her neighbour being a rheumatic patient from Baden.

The Waldhof seemed as if it were perched on the top of a mountain, so tedious was the climb up to it in the heavily-laden omnibus. Eager to stretch her limbs, Greta sprang out directly they stopped, only to be ordered back again by the commissionaire. The two ladies were to go to the *dependance* for the night, it was quite close, they could see it over there.

‘Then we can walk,’ said Greta, determined not to drive a step farther.

This being permitted, Greta led the way down a steep stony drive towards lights which indicated a house. Fred grumbled a good deal as she followed. Unwilling to own herself beaten, she felt tired, head-achy and cross. Breathing invectives against the manager of the Waldhof, promising herself revenge when her father

came, and wishing for Bob who could, as she said, 'give tongue' on occasion, Fred came slowly behind her cheerful leader.

'It's much better fun than going to the hotel, we can go to hotels any day,' said Greta, as they entered a long low cottage.

They were received by a pretty German girl, whose beaming face and friendly manner made up for any deficiencies of speech, her English being almost as scanty as Greta's German. She led them up an easy flight of stairs into a good-sized bedroom, which Fred pronounced bare and Greta airy.

'Look at the dear little beds, not a bit like English beds,' cried Greta, discovering two tight-looking little couches with scarlet blankets strapped over them and lace-trimmed feather beds on top. 'I don't feel a bit sleepy though.'

'Well, I do then,' confessed Fred, breaking out at last, 'my head aches, I want nothing but tea and bed. Greta, you're an

insult to suffering humanity, I believe you want to be out now, climbing up after the electric light and the waterfall.'

'Well, doesn't it seem rather a pity to be wasting one's time in bed when there's so much to be seen.'

Nevertheless, Greta slept soundly, and woke next morning to find sheets of rain blotting out the landscape.

Fred was not altogether sorry for an excuse to lie in bed.

'We must try to get some breakfast here, we can't go to the hotel this weather,' she remarked, turning to sleep again.

Having discovered some German dialogue in a guide-book, Greta went forth to give orders. But the young mistress of the house, Mademoiselle Louise, now presented herself, speaking good English.

'She's so nice,' said Greta, as she returned, bringing Fred a cup of tea. 'I wish we were going to stay here altogether. It's the

foresters' house and not a *dependance* at all.'

'But can they give us breakfast?'

'Oh, yes, we can have raw ham,' said Greta, gravely. 'I've just learnt that boiled ham is not good for man. Oh, how I wish it didn't rain. We might have had breakfast on a great wooden balcony with a lovely view, if we could only see it.'

As they sat over their coffee and rolls, the weather cleared, hills and pinewoods coming gradually into view. Greta ran from one window to another, catching new aspects of the place.

'Look at the hills above us, though we are up so high,' she cried enraptured. Greta's idea of enjoyment was to have infinite hills to climb. And Fred was set on training herself for Swiss mountains. Waldberg was the very place for them, since the only difficulty was to get a level walk.

After breakfast, Fred declared herself ready to go out and explore. They must

find the waterfall. Disdaining to ask their way, they missed the shortest and prettiest route, but they enjoyed a sense of discovery when the white column of water with its dark background came into view.

Returning in the middle of the twelve o'clock *table-d'hôte*, they made acquaintance with a prodigious compound of boiled beef and gooseberry jam which almost fulfilled Greta's petition :

‘Let us have everything as funny as we can for dinner.’

Some of the guests told tales of their sleeping accommodation at the Waldhof, which made Fred think better of her comfortable room at the forest house. Finding that only two rooms on the first-floor could be secured for her party that night, the other rooms being vaguely described as rather high up, Fred decided on staying at her present quarters.

‘We shall lose this if we don't look out,’ she declared, after a hasty interview with

Mademoiselle Louise. 'And now we must make a rush for the station unless you like to take the omnibus.'

Greta scouting this idea, they hurried down the village street, arriving much too soon for the train from Baden.

'I wish Bob was coming,' said Fred, as they walked up and down.

Greta could scarcely echo the wish. She knew that Jack would have made much more difficulty about her going if Bob had been of the party.

'Arundel promised to come if he could,' Fred went on. 'I wrote from Plymouth telling him our plans, but I hardly think he can get away yet.'

This was no news to Greta. Fred had spoken of Arundel before, though not, as it happened, in Jack's hearing.

'I hope he will come,' said Greta, after a moment's deliberation, 'he's great fun, though you know, Fred, he's not my sort of man.'

The unfortunate man thus described was in the approaching train, having left no stone unturned to follow on their track from the moment he received Fred's letter. He had succeeded in overtaking some of the party, and hearing that the others were already at Waldberg, he was arriving in the highest spirits.

Fred exclaimed with delight, and Greta felt an excitement which surprised herself, at the sight of Arundel. She could scarcely tell whether the feeling was pleasant or otherwise.

‘Do you mean to walk?’ asked Arundel.

‘Rather,’ said Fred, answering for herself and Greta.

Maud hesitated an instant, then, seeing that the way looked uninviting, she followed her parents into the rapidly filling omnibus.

‘Did you wire for a room?’ asked Fred, ‘you’ll be put to sleep in the balcony or the dog-kennel, if you didn’t.’

‘I’m not particular. The dog-kennel might be a tight fit perhaps.’

‘It’s a very big dog,’ said Greta.

‘What an unkind reflection on my size!’

Greta did not contribute much to the conversation. She let Fred run on with her own version of the journey, and abstained from throwing any doubt on her friend’s prowess. But when Fred declared that Greta could not speak a word of German, Greta was moved to remark that a word of German was exactly what she could speak.

‘And a very useful word too,’ she added.

‘Do teach it me,’ said Arundel, ‘I learnt lots of words, but they never happened to be the ones wanted. I was coaching up Ahn all yesterday. But they don’t seem to use Ahn at the railway-stations. There ought to be a law about it.’

‘To make them use Ahn?’ cried Fred.

‘Or to make Ahn useful. I don’t want

to know if the porter's female cousin has her false cat sold.'

'I don't believe that's in Ahn,' said Fred.

'Well, then, I don't want to go about telling them that the chimney-sweep's daughters have black faces. One might as well be Mr. F.'s aunt. "There are mile-stones on the Dover road."'

'Well, I mean to make myself perfect in German whilst I'm here,' said Fred. 'I sat next a German at the *table-d'hôte*, he speaks English a little better than I speak German, but I shall propose a plan for mutual improvement. He shall talk to me in English and I shall talk to him in German, and we can tell each other when we make mistakes.'

'You don't seem to have lost much time in making acquaintances,' remarked Arundel. 'Have you formed any alliance for the improvement of your mind, Miss Charlstrom?'

‘No, I’m not sure that I’ve got a mind to improve.’

‘Greta means to improve nothing but her climbing,’ said Fred. ‘Look at all those hills, Arundel, and prepare yourself to climb them everyone.’

‘We’re not exactly walking on level ground now, are we? I feel rather like the man in “Excelsior;” I suppose that hero had what you would call a real good time. Oh, dear,’ he added, with a groan, ‘has this thing got a top, Miss Charlstrom?’

‘You mustn’t call Greta Miss Charlstrom, or people will be fancying she’s the eldest daughter,’ said Fred, ‘we’re all one family here, you know. You must say Miss Greta, if she won’t let you call her Greta.’

‘I shouldn’t think of taking such a liberty, even if Miss Greta permitted it, which she wouldn’t. I stand in great awe of Miss Greta.’

‘I see my presence has a depressing

effect, so I'm going to withdraw it,' said Greta. 'I shall just run into the cottage and write a letter home, Fred, I'll come on afterwards.'

'Why, you wrote home yesterday, they can't want another letter yet.'

'I must write to Jack, I promised.' Some passing impulse prompted Greta to add, 'I'm engaged to Jack.' She would have obeyed it if she had found herself alone with Fred at that moment, but it was impossible to blurt out such a fact before Captain Mace.

'Who on earth is Jack?' asked Arundel, as Greta ran away.

'He's her brother, that is to say her step-brother or whatever you call it, young Daman. I don't think much of him, or of old Daman either. But Greta swears by them. She's off in a moment like a rocket if you say anything disparaging. And she's so eager not to seem ashamed of Mr. Daman's business that I go in fear of her

calling out in the middle of *table-d'hôte*,
“My father keeps a shop.”’

‘I think I begin to see why she calls herself a liberal.’

‘Oh, that’s all nonsense, she knows no more of politics than a baby. She is a baby so far as ideas go. She’s had no one to develop her mind or to make her give a reason for the faith that is in her.’

‘But now we shall see the touch of a master-hand.’

‘You may laugh as much as you like, but I know a great deal more than Greta. She’s got mind and will too, if she’d only use them.’

‘I don’t observe any deficiency in the last item.’

‘She’s lived in one narrow groove,’ continued Fred, not heeding the interruption as she planted herself in front of the hotel to deliver her views. ‘She’s full of country town prejudices, and *bourgeois* notions. Don’t you see it yourself?’ asked

Fred, impatiently, as she found her companion unresponsive.

‘I’m afraid I like *bourgeois* notions if they mean some of our mothers’, not to say our grandmothers’ ways.’

‘But she might be so charming.’

‘Isn’t she charming.’

‘She’s young and pretty, that’s all you think of. But she won’t always be eighteen. I suppose you don’t mean to say that she couldn’t be altered for the better in a single respect.’

‘In one respect she might be altered very much for the better.’

But Arundel refused to explain himself, and Fred’s penetration was for once at fault.

CHAPTER XV.

‘WE’VE been here a week, a whole week,’ said Greta, leaning from the balcony of the forest house and drawing in a long breath of the fresh, pine-scented morning air.

A week of sunshine and revel in outdoor life, a week of unthinking and all-sufficing enjoyment. Although Lynton and Clovelly, Exmoor and Torquay, had broken the news to her, Greta never climbed the pine-clad hills of Waldberg without a sense of surprise at the surpassing loveliness of this earth. The murmur of rills on their several ways to the Rhine, the Neckar, and the Danube, mingled in her ears with the

singing of birds and the chirping of grasshoppers, from morning till night. For the first time in her life Greta saw forget-me-nots as thick as buttercups and daisies, painting the meadows with delight. In the complete joy of the present, Greta had ceased to look forward even to the Swiss mountains.

She gave herself no concern as to the possible term of her stay. Till a recall should come, home-life, with the small cares which had lately ruffled its course, seemed very far away. So did her engagement and marriage and all the practical things of life. Nothing was real but the little world around her. There was a touch of fairy-land about this place, which had not even been a name to Greta three weeks ago. The very uncertainty of their stay at Waldberg made each day more precious. The old general might any day give the word to march. At present he was in better health and temper than he had been for

years, and gave Waldberg the credit of completing a cure commenced at Baden. Lady Charlstrom's voice did not carry much weight in the family councils, but, having suffered from the heat at Baden, and hearing gruesome tales of the heat of Switzerland, she made no suggestion of moving. Maud had made friends at Baden who had followed her to Waldberg. Fred was cultivating her German acquaintance, if not her German, since her ideas usually flowed too freely to be expressed in any but her natural tongue. Greta made friends with everyone, with the old women and children who were always plaiting straws and giving *Guten Tag* to the passers-by, even with the saturnine dog, on whom Fred had billeted Arundel. She had grown intimate with Mademoiselle Louise, and her acquaintance with their pretty attendant was progressing rapidly, though the two girls could only exchange ideas by means of signs and isolated words, peals of

laughter filling up gaps in the conversation. Fred had grown as fond of the forest house as Greta, and would not hear of moving to the hotel.

‘It’s much nicer to breakfast here,’ she remarked, as she joined Greta in the balcony, ‘we get it over sooner. And we must start early for St Bauerin.’

Fred imported a slight air of business into her pleasure. She had laid strenuous injunctions on Arundel to be early at the cottage, and he came strolling down the steep incline from the Waldhof before they had quite finished breakfast.

‘We’re not ready for you yet,’ she said, ‘but I like early rising.’

‘It’s an enforced virtue ; they clear out the passages and coal-holes where the bachelors sleep, first thing. As for the coffee-room, it’s a feminine bower till about eleven. So I have no choice but to turn out.’

‘Did you see my German this morning?’

‘Yes, but I didn’t tell him where we were going.’

‘You might have let him come; he could tell us all about the places.’

‘Not better than Baeddeker, I daresay; I brought him for your benefit. Miss Greta’s like me, she can look at a hill without wanting to know its name.’

‘It’s more than you can do for a man, then,’ retorted Fred; ‘you want his pedigree and a reference to his banker before you think him fit to speak to us.’

Fred left the balcony as she spoke, and Greta, taking her hat, went down to Arundel.

‘I wish you’d brought the poor German,’ she observed, ‘Fred would have liked to have him.’

‘So should I, immensely; you don’t know how self-denying I am.’

‘It isn’t as if Fred was a flirt, and there isn’t a bit of nonsense about her; she never thinks of such things,’ said Greta, colour-

ing and getting a little involved in her explanation as she suddenly remembered that she was talking to a young man.

‘You needn’t tell me that, I know Fred extends her good fellowship impartially to both sexes. I hope your interpretation of nonsense isn’t too wide, Miss Greta?’

‘I only know that I’m not romantic.’

‘No, I don’t think you are,’ said Fred, joining them. ‘You don’t even care for novels. Why, how far have you got in “Success”?’

‘Oh, to where the people begin love-making. But I liked them better when they were quarrelling.’

‘Of course they begin with a little aversion. Lovers always do in German stories.’

‘But real lovers don’t.’

‘Do you believe in nothing but love at first sight, Miss Greta?’

‘No, I call that nonsense. People can’t love anyone they’ve only seen once.’

““Love at first sight first-born and heir of all,”” quoted Arundel.

‘I don’t care for poet’s talk.’

‘Will you give me a prosaic version, then?’

‘I never define, I don’t know how. And I can’t enjoy my walk if you want me to be clever. Oh, what a glorious butterfly!’

‘A Camberwell beauty, by Jove!’ exclaimed Arundel.

‘If it would only settle for a moment!’

‘I know you’re hungering for a cork. I daresay you’ve got pins about you.’

‘Brute!’ returned Greta, shortly.

‘Have I put my foot in it? I thought you wanted a specimen.’

Finding that she had been betrayed into taking chaff seriously, Greta sought about for revenge.

‘Of course soldiers are cruel!’ she remarked, ‘and doctors——’

‘And butchers,’ added Arundel ; ‘I wouldn’t leave them out.’

‘I won’t, or knackers either ; I daresay they’re all equally callous to suffering.’

‘We’re not allowed to go about potting our fellow-creatures indiscriminately, you know.’

‘Greta, you don’t deserve to be a soldier’s daughter,’ said Fred.

‘I’m not at all proud of the distinction.’

‘Then you ought to be. I am. I think very little of men who are not in the army. It’s the only thing I envy them. We can do everything else better than they can, but I’m afraid we couldn’t stand campaigning.’

‘I could,’ said Greta, with a happy ignorance of the thoughts passing through Arundel’s mind.

They had got into the open country now, and Greta’s course grew erratic as monster harebells and tiny red pinks offered irre-

sistible temptations. In her pink zephyr dress and straw hat, a glow of sunburn warming the soft tints of her face, the sunshine lighting up her brown hair, she might have inspired Fred's exclamation :

‘What a lovely picture.’

‘A sight to make an old man young.’

‘I wasn't thinking of the figure in the foreground. A fitting figure, I confess.

“Du bist wie eine Blume
So hold, so schön, so rein,”

as my German quoted when I asked him what he thought of Greta.’

‘Hang your German.’

‘Arundel, you're getting sentimental.’

‘You've got your own notion of sentiment.’ Then, as Greta came back to them, he turned to her. ‘I didn't offer to pick for you because I know that's the best part, but perhaps I may be allowed to carry your spoils.’

‘Wait till I've stuck some in my dress and made a bunch for Fred.’

‘And a bunch to stick in my dress too.’

‘Take as many as you like,’ said Greta, holding out her flowers. ‘Why, your fingers are all thumbs,’ she exclaimed, as he began displaying the most painstaking awkwardness. ‘Put the stems even—so——’

‘Thanks, how clever you are, I only want a pin now.’

‘Well—if you’ll promise not to use it in the pursuit of natural history.’

‘Do you know,’ said Arundel, as he fumbled at his button-hole. ‘I once asked a lady for a tuft of primroses and she looked as if I’d insulted her.’

‘Did she, how silly.’

‘Wasn’t it; would you believe that she looked like an outraged canary?’

‘Oh,’ returned Greta, with awakened recollection. ‘I wouldn’t recall my own impertinences if I were you.’

‘You were awfully down on me that day, I think you’re a little milder now.’

‘I’ve found out that you’re only a professional jester, I didn’t know how harmless you were at first.’

“Get out, you funny little man,” as Miss Fotheringay remarked to Foker. That’s the way you regard me now.’

‘Very much. But do look at the mute reproach conveyed in Fred’s vanishing form !’

Perhaps Arundel understood Fred’s retreat better. However little he might desire a confidant, he could scarcely reject the services of a willing and efficient ally. Her eyes being opened, Fred showed her usual activity in Arundel’s service. The novelist showed some skill in handling a real plot. As consolation for playing an outsider’s part, she probably took notes for the lighter scenes in her realistic romance of the Old Bailey.

During their stay at Waldberg, Fred developed a taste for sketching which served her friend’s cause, whilst it shed a

new radiance on her own future. She already saw her Black Forest landscapes on the walls of the exhibition, and read glowing notices of them in the papers. Her triumphs had hitherto consisted in the skying of one or two tiny flower pieces amongst a collection which was so select as scarcely to enjoy recognition beyond the circle of the exhibitors and their friends. But Fred was blessed with a double portion of the hope which is said to spring eternal. Any success elated her, no failure disheartened her.

‘I do think she’s the happiest creature in the world,’ remarked Greta, one day as they strayed away leaving Fred under a big umbrella, washing in an expanse of country which it was absolutely impossible that she could have seen at once.

‘That’s been my conclusion for some time,’ said Arundel. ‘She carries a fund of entertainment in herself. Most of us want some amusement to fill up the day,

Fred could amuse herself for forty-eight hours in the day if she had them.'

'Now, you're getting metaphysical and making my head ache.'

'I don't believe your head ever ached in its life or your heart either. I'm convinced they're both sound and good as new.'

'A doubtful compliment if it means that I never thought of anything or cared for anybody.'

'You may have cared for your parents and teachers, and pastors and masters. That doesn't mean wear and tear.'

'It's all alike, I think.'

'You're slightly ambiguous, but so far as I can grasp your meaning it seems to me to show utter ignorance of the matter.'

'I know more about it than you think.'

'I'm sorry to hear it.'

'Oh, you're thinking of heart-aches, I know nothing about them.'

‘It’s not likely you ever will.’

‘You carry them lightly enough considering your wide experience. Oh, dear,’ she cried, as an almost forgotten episode rushed into her mind, just a minute too late, ‘I beg your pardon, I forgot, it was all before I knew you.’

‘In a former life, I think, or perhaps it happened to another person. You heard all about it?’

‘Mrs. Randall told me—just after it happened. I was very sorry for you.’

‘Thank you for kind thoughts.’

‘I didn’t think of you much,’ confessed Greta, eager to disown unmerited praise, ‘I always try not to think of painful things. But in church—about people in this transitory life, you know—I couldn’t help thinking of you then.’

‘I could ask no better place in your thoughts, at least not at that time. Tell me,’ he added, after a slight pause, ‘can you fancy a boy and girl growing

up together, always fond of each other?’

‘Like me and Jack,’ thought Greta.

‘Oh, yes, I can fancy that quite well.’

‘Good friends like Fred and I might be, only the girl happened to be much prettier than Fred, and that made the boy more sentimental about her.’

‘It always does,’ said Greta, as if deploring the fact.

‘Growing into man and woman, but going on just the same, the girl at least desiring no change. But the older people, the wise ones, you know, find out that this is not the conventional state of things. It must be all or nothing. Rather reluctantly the girl consents to make it all. Six weeks end it. They might have let her alone a little longer.’

No answer, only a friendly look from eyes as clear and guileless as a little child’s. Presently in a low voice Greta said,

‘You went abroad.’

‘As soon as I could. I don’t believe in change, not that sort of change at least, but it was something to get away from the condolences. Don’t think me unfeeling, but you don’t know what it is to see every face change its shape and expression at the sight of you. I’ve been spoiling your walk, I’m afraid. Won’t you begin picking blue-bells again and crying out at the birds with red tails.’

‘That’s all I’m good for.’

‘Don’t alter yourself whatever you do,

“Be everything that now thou art
Be nothing that thou art not.”

I won’t ask you who wrote that.’

‘You’d better not. You’re awful people for quotations, you and Fred, I feel as if I’d gone to school again.’

They had been wandering aimlessly round the wooded hill, and came out on a level gap in the pines overlooking the village.

‘I shall run down to the post-office

and see if there are any letters,' said Greta.

'I'll come and interpret for you.'

'Why, I'm learning to talk like a native. Didn't I send a parcel by post and declare its contents with their length and breadth and weight?'

'You got the whole town to help you, so far as I remember. Given great natural advantages and an obliging people to deal with, who couldn't score? I'm obliged to pull out my passport and talk pages of pure German before they'll give me my letters.'

'Try Schiller's "Song of the Bell," Fred's always repeating it.'

'I never heard her; don't tell her so, or she'll insist on reciting. Well,' added Arundel, 'you don't look pleased with your letter now you've got it.'

Greta was looking with some apprehension at a closely written and crossed sheet in Aunt Sophy's writing.

‘It wasn’t worth calling for,’ she declared, beginning to read as she went along.

‘Nothing amiss, I hope?’ said Arundel, seeing her face cloud.

‘Only something that makes me angry.’

They had reached a little wooden bridge, and Greta leaned against the post, reading. Aunt Sophy expressed herself lengthily in the style of a time when brevity in a letter was almost thought rude, at least by women. She urged Greta to come home and look after her lover. Opal, she explained, was working her dark designs and gaining a malign influence over Jack. There was no limit to the ascendancy a cunning, unscrupulous woman could gain over a weak man. And Jack was as weak as water; Greta might remember that she, the writer, had always told her so. As for Opal, Miss Gay stated that she had established her identity with the Opal Carew of Brussels beyond all doubt. Her present behaviour was just what might

have been expected from her antecedents. Greta had better come quickly or it might be too late.

‘Does she think I’m going to fight over my lover?’ Greta asked herself, indignantly. ‘Does she suppose I’d try to hang on to a man who didn’t want me?’

Then Greta reproached herself for taking anything Aunt Sophy said seriously, and, returning to her letter, found a postscript.

‘Remember, my dear niece, that this is no mere question of your own happiness or of your own selfish welfare. The fortunes of your family depend solely on Jack. His marriage with you will not only secure a good provision to yourself, it will bind his interests to those of both your parents. Marriage with another would probably estrange him and bring ruin to you all.’

‘Does she want to make me throw Jack over,’ thought Greta, furiously. ‘I’d do it directly if I believed her. But I don’t,’ she exclaimed, tearing the letter up and

throwing it into the stream. 'I wish I had kept it and sent it to Jack,' she thought, next minute, 'but I'll write to him instead, and I'll write to Aunt Sophy.'

Greta began walking on, and Arundel joined her in silence. She turned and looked at him defiantly.

'You needn't begin about canary-birds; I know I'm ruffled.'

'I'd smoothe your plumage if I could. I scarcely dare venture to offer you these forget-me-nots; I picked them whilst you were rending your correspondent by proxy.'

'It was a nasty, spiteful letter, and I mean to write a nasty, spiteful answer.'

'Do you always return evil for evil?'

'Shouldn't you if some one tried to set you against a friend?'

'I don't think I should notice it. Silence is often as cutting as abuse, and always much safer.'

'I never think of what's safe.'

'People don't till they've lived long

enough to brew themselves a few tons of hot water.'

'Shouldn't you tell the person what was said against them?'

'That depends on the person. All I can say for myself is, let me be abused behind my back by choice.'

Greta pondered for a few moments, her fingers playing absently with the flowers which she had mechanically taken from Arundel. At last she spoke.

'Perhaps it shows a little distrust to make people explain things?'

CHAPTER XVI.

DURING Greta's absence Miss Gay found full scope for the detective faculty which she supposed herself to possess. She saw—just as much as Opal chose. To be found out was part of that young lady's plan, but she did not mean to be wholly found out at first. Neither did she wish to be found out by Mrs. Daman. An explanation with her employer might lead to a summary dismissal which would disconcert all her schemes, especially one which she held in reserve. If she could not, detach Jack from Greta, Opal meant to detach Greta from Jack. It would not, she thought, be difficult to entrap Jack

into some appearance of inconstancy which should provoke his *fiancée* to throw him over. Opal felt confident that Greta would tolerate no unfaithfulness in a lover. It would matter nothing to her that the reign of the strange goddess might be obviously ephemeral. The smallest disloyalty would be an unpardonable sin in Greta's eyes.

At this stage of her career, Opal was upheld by a conviction that success awaited her. She had been a believer in presentiments all her life. Coming events had more than once, in her experience, seemed to cast their shadows before. The shadows had usually been threatening, like those which had almost driven her back from the gates of the Glebe House. But now, the vague oracle elated her with promise of coming triumph. It told her, in a voice audible to some inner sense, that the days of poverty and drudgery were over, that fortune was coming at last with both hands full. Heedless of the fact that she had

never rightly guessed the form which fulfilment would take, Opal told herself that the marriage she desired was plainly foreshadowed. Confident assurance added force to a will already stronger than the one to which it opposed itself.

Jack had begun with fatally good resolutions. Greta had never reigned more absolutely over his affections than now ; it seemed impossible that any other woman could find a place even in his fancy. Since he could not take himself from home in the present crisis, Jack determined to return late, to devote his evenings to accounts, to bear the infliction of Aunt Sophy's company rather than risk himself within reach of Opal's wiles. Opal had grown much prettier of late, he could not help seeing that. She was a good deal admired too. It was the season of garden-parties, which were more comprehensive than the formal winter entertainments. Invitations were elastic, and Mrs. Daman

often sent Opal out with Miss Gay, who had a starved longing after the gaiety which she had never enjoyed. Opal made the most of her opportunities. She had thrown off the shrinking, half servile manner with which she had been used to seek favour.

Miss Gay brought home dreadful tales of Opal's 'goings on.' On one occasion when Bob Charlstrom had appeared, starting up suddenly from some distant quarter, Opal was reported to have scandalised the county. This was at least an adequate version of the fact that some one had said, 'How that girl is flirting.' Greta was not the only person who had power to rouse Jack's jealousy. It was his nature to be jealous—of his chums, of his little sister, of his dogs when they lavished their favours elsewhere. Even whilst he flew from Opal's devotion, he did not like to hear that she was consoling herself. In his folly, he made an allusion which gave

her the opening she had been looking for.

Opal and Bowwow had met Jack on his way home from the station. It was not his fault if they took their walk in the evening and chose to come his road. But he need not have drawn Bowwow's attention to an early bit of honeysuckle which was sufficiently inaccessible to keep her scrambling in the hedge.

'My flirtations,' said Opal, taking the word out of Jack's mouth. 'I'm sure I never seek them, I suppose every girl likes to find herself admired. And I sometimes think I must be revolting. I want to be reassured now and then. But,' bending her head with her favourite air of modest submission, 'if you care what I do——'

Jack looked back impatiently, but Bowwow was picking wild roses. He felt a velvet touch on his arm as Opal spoke again.

'Mr. Charlstrom wanted to know if I was going to Fern Lea. It wasn't easy for

him to come, he said. Shall I go? I won't if you'd rather I didn't.'

'I don't think philandering with a fellow like that can do you any good, it only makes people talk.'

'I don't mind their talk, I only mind you. And I don't philander. Not one of those men should kiss the hem of my dress.'

As Opal was not like Greta, chary of her condescension, this was saying a good deal.

'But I can't be trampled on for ever,' continued Opal. 'I don't mean to stay here much longer. You needn't tell them, but I don't. I can't stand a good many things, and I must make myself friends when I can.'

'If you'll excuse my saying so, I don't think Bob Charlstrom's a marrying man.'

'Any man's a marrying man if he falls in love. But I don't want him. No doubt I ought not to allow myself preferences. It's a taste above my station, I suppose, still

it's there,' said Opal, with a little plaintive laugh.

Bowwow came running back, and Jack congratulated himself on having got out of an awkward position.

Next day Opal met him again. Bowwow ran off at once.

'Mr. Daman,' said Opal, with an air of determination. 'I'm in a difficulty and I've come to consult you. I think you are my friend, at least I've got no other. Long ago when I was at school, a man used to send me letters and try to meet me in all sorts of clandestine ways. There was a good deal of love-making going on in the school. The girls used to edge each other on and think it grand, I suppose I thought it grand too. I know I never really cared about it, but I just followed the bigger girls. One day there was a blow-up. The governess didn't dare punish the rich girls, and she was dreadfully afraid of a scandal. But she was obliged to do some-

thing, so she made an example of me. It didn't matter. There were a lot of prigs in the school who were shocked of course. One of the greatest prigs was a certain Emily Harrison. Miss Gay has unearthed her somehow, and means to bring her face to face with me, Bowwow told me so. I've done nothing to be ashamed of, but I'm not in a position to face a garbled version of that story. Anything serves to take the bread out of a governess's mouth. If this girl sees me it's all up with my chance of getting pupils. If she doesn't see me she can never say positively that I am her Opal Carew. Listen,' she added, as Jack seemed about to speak, 'I won't hide anything from you. I let your mother and Greta think it was my cousin when Miss Gay told them this story months ago. I didn't tell any falsehood. They jumped to the conclusion, and I didn't contradict them, that's all. But it makes it worse for me now.'

Jack, seeing with the eyes of twenty only one side of the question, and that the extremely pretty one before him, declared that it was an infernal shame.

‘It’s cruel,’ said Opal; ‘my life isn’t too smooth anyhow. But won’t you take pity on me and tell me what I can do. Emily Harrison comes the day after to-morrow.’

‘For how long?’

‘Only one day. She’s going to Penzance. Miss Gay has persuaded her to stop here on her way.’

‘Have a telegram to call you away.’

‘Who’s to send it? You forget that I haven’t got friends like other people.’

‘I could send it, for that matter.’

‘And where am I to go when I’ve got it?’

‘Oh, anywhere; you must know somebody.’

‘I give you my word the only people who would take me in are an old school-

fellow and her mother who live in London. And a journey to London, even third-class, is ruinous.'

'Don't let that stand in your way.'

'I mustn't let anything stand in the way if I can help it,' said Opal, bursting into tears. 'I'm the most forlorn creature in the world, and my living is going to be taken from me.'

'Not a bit of it,' said Jack; 'I'm sure mother wouldn't believe this Emily Harrison against you.'

'Pray don't tell her you know anything about it. And Bowwow mustn't let out that she warned me.'

'I'll answer for Bowwow. What shall I wire?'

'"Mother dangerously ill, come at once. Polly."'

'Will you wire to them that you're coming?'

'Oh, no, they'll take me in fast enough. I can sleep on the sofa.'

The only immediate result of Opal's scare was a four days' holiday, which she spent joyously in parading Oxford Street and Westbourne Grove with her friend, picking up bargains with which the shops overflowed in these last days of summer. Thanks to Jack, Opal secured quite a little feminine equipment.

Emily Harrison did not come to Avon-uish. She sent Miss Gay a telegram declining to break her journey. Perhaps she had no taste for detective's work. But Opal's flight was conclusive evidence in Miss Gay's eyes.

'Don't tell me she didn't know,' was her answer to Mrs. Daman's defence, 'she's quite capable of listening at the door.'

In spite of himself, Jack was drawn closer to Opal by her confidence. He had found something straight-forward in her confession, and he was touched by her genuine gratitude. Besides, he had found it very dull when she was away. Before

long he was giving Aunt Sophy good occasion to write her warning letter, though she was not yet quite behind the scenes. Jack's scruples were sleeping and Opal's cares forgotten in a happy dream, when from the cloudless sky that hung above Rheinfels a thunder-bolt descended on the household at Avonuish.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE sound of a mighty torrent had succeeded the soft murmur of the Waldberg rills. With wondering eyes Greta stood gazing at a rushing living sheet of green water which scattered showers of white and iridescent foam. Half screened by pink oleanders, she leaned over the broad balcony of the Rheinhof at Rheinfels. The wild riot of sight and sound filled Greta with a sense of exultation. It was something widely different from the more peaceful delight which she had felt at Waldberg. The time of *Sturm-und-Drang* was at hand. But the present was still all in all.

‘I should like to be in the midst of it,’

cried Greta, watching with envious eyes a little boat which was struggling backwards and forwards, round and round, in the eddy as it approached a narrow rock which divided the Falls and offered a central point of view to the adventurous.

‘You and Fred had better get Arundel to take you,’ said the general. ‘I don’t think it’s much in Maud’s line or mine.’

‘It makes me giddy only to look,’ observed Maud, turning away and posing her fine figure against an orange-tree, to the admiration of the tourists who were taking every variety of light refreshment at little tables on the terrace. Swiss maiden waitresses flitted to and fro.

‘I wonder whether their dress would be effective at a fancy-ball,’ remarked Maud, ‘it’s much plainer than the Swiss costumes people always wear. Do find out where they get those great silver chains, Fred.’

‘Suppose I were to sketch one of the

girls,' suggested Fred, 'just roughly for the sake of the dress.'

'Oh, you won't go in a boat if you begin sketching,' objected Greta.

'We'd much better go in the morning. There, that's the prettiest girl, I hope she doesn't mind having her portrait taken.'

'She won't recognise it,' observed Maud, who had sat to Fred herself.

Greta did not join the little knot round the artist. She remained looking steadily at the Falls, and did not see the look of intelligence which passed amongst the others when Arundel came in with his hands full of letters and stepped quickly to her side.

'Nothing for you, Miss Greta.'

'I want to go in a boat,' was Greta's only answer.

'Let's go then. Might I suggest a mackintosh over that dress?'

‘You mustn’t go without me,’ cried Fred. ‘I want to go, though I know it must be horrid. No one would think of going twice.’

‘We can get nearer the Falls without taking a boat, if you like,’ said Arundel, addressing Greta.

‘Of course you won’t go, Fred—will you, Maud?’ said Greta, lingering.

‘No, thanks, it can’t be half so nice as this,’ returned Maud, with a half smile.

Arundel led the way for some moments in silence.

‘Has anything bothered you?’ asked Greta, suddenly.

‘Nothing but the idea that my holiday is nearly over.’

Greta exclaimed, with some consternation. She had thought of her own holiday coming to an end, but not of his.

‘I ought to be shooting grouse next week, it’s “poor pa’s” one diversion, and I must give him a few days. Oh, dear, what

am I talking about, you'll think me an old murderer. I suppose you'd never look at me again if I ventured to send you some grouse.'

'It's a nasty cruel sport, but men will do it. Jack loves shooting, though I'm always trying to make him give it up.'

'I'll be more tractable than Jack, I'll never shoot another bird if you'll like me a little better for it.'

'Oh, you want to be bribed.'

'I do. Think of all the innocent lives you might save. I'm a dead shot, of course.'

'What would your father say?'

'He'd be simply disgusted with me; I should have to make play with a gun, you know, only I should take care never to hit anything, except a gillie perhaps. But I'll brave the parental disgust for your favour.'

'I won't trust you. You know I never do take you quite seriously, I learnt that early in our acquaintance.'

This was by no means the turn which Arundel wished to give to the conversation.

‘If I was ill-advised enough to try to tease you at first, I’m sure I never venture to do so now,’ he said, with a slight falter on the last word.

‘No, you’ve grown quite stupid.’

This might be considered an extinguisher for a man who wished to talk sentiment, but Arundel was not without resources. He would have turned Greta’s charge to account if they had not at that moment reached the château through which they had to pass to get a nearer view of the Falls. Greta hailed it as the threshold of enterprise, whilst Arundel found that he had little chance of twisting the talk to his purpose amidst an exhibition of musical tables and chairs. Neither could he arrest Greta’s eager steps as she ran along the little slippery paths which led from the château close down to the Falls.

Greta scarcely paused till she reached

the last resting-place, where the torrent thundered almost within reach. Arundel followed her closely to the farthest ledge.

‘I daren’t touch you,’ he said, as she persistently rejected his hand.

Greta had not spoken since she came under the spell of the waters. She looked rather awe-struck, yet there was a feeling of intensified life about her. As she gazed on the fury of white, roaring water, she was half-conscious of a desire to grasp the present moment and hold it fast. She made none of her usual running commentary on the sights and sounds.

In silence they returned through the château, across the bridge towards the hotel. They did not go back quite the same way as they had come. Arundel contrived to lose the direct road and to find a quiet path by the river. His face was graver than usual. Greta knew it though she avoided his eyes. He had something to tell her. She had something

to tell him too, and she knew that she ought to tell her story first. But she could not bring it out. He was the first to speak.

‘If I believed it possible, I should say you were tired. Won’t you sit down?’

It sounded like a prayer. Arundel had never spoken to her in exactly that tone before, but she had always been vaguely conscious of liking his voice. With a feeling of guilt, Greta sank on the little bench, conscience telling her that she ought to hurry on.

‘Some one has left a book,’ she said, with a last effort to make safe conversation. ‘“Sonnets,”—what is a sonnet?’

‘You don’t like definitions. Shall I read you one as an illustration?—Perhaps this may help me,’ thought Arundel, fluttering over the leaves with a half-smile as he remembered that reading poetry was one of his accomplishments. Thoroughly in earnest as he was, he had a latent sense of amusement at his lately revealed self.

The sonnet which Arundel chose did not happen to be in the collection which he held in his hand. It was only suggested by a similar one which seemed too trite for his purpose. But Greta supposed him to be reading.

‘Belovèd, my belovèd, when I think
That thou wast in the world a year ago,
What time I sat alone here in the snow
And saw no footprint, heard the silence sink
No moment at thy voice, but link by link,
Went counting all my chains as if that so
They never could fall off at any blow
Struck by thy possible hand,—why, thus I drink
Of life’s great cup of wonder! Wonderful,
Never to feel thee thrill the day or night
With personal act or speech,—nor ever cull
Some prescience of thee with the blossoms white
Thou sawest growing——’

The verse ceased, but the voice went on—

‘A world without Greta. Would you send me back to such a world?’

Greta made no sign, though she felt him close beside her trying to read her face.

‘Won’t you even look at me?’ he asked.

‘Do you keep all your kindness for the butterflies and the birds? Have you none for a man who loves you so that he feels stupid before you?’

Greta had drawn herself back into the farthest corner of the bench. She kept her hands tightly clasped as Arundel tried to touch them. Her eyes had a shocked, appealing look, her lips were white as she moved them.

‘I ought to have told you before. I’m engaged. Oh, my poor Jack!’ cried Greta, with a sudden gust of remorseful shame as she rushed away.

Flying to the shelter of her bed-room, she ran against Fred, who caught her arm.

‘Whatever is it? You look as if you’d seen a ghost.’

‘Let me alone; I must go home,’ gasped Greta. Then, as Fred refused to let her alone, she cried out impatiently by way of explanation, ‘I’m engaged to Jack.’

‘And you never told us,’ cried Fred,

indignantly, 'and you let poor Arundel go on! Greta, you've behaved shamefully! Where is he? I must find him,' and Fred ran away to try to console 'poor Arundel.'

It was 'poor Jack' with Greta, Jack to whom she had given a stone. She knew now what a poor pretence she had offered him by way of love. This was love—this, which had made Waldberg Eden—this, which had made her fly from Arundel—this, which thrilled her with a fearful joy even whilst she shuddered over her broken faith.

From childhood Greta had accepted the fact that she belonged to Jack. It seemed now almost as if, being married, she had let herself listen to words of love from a stranger. Shame was her strongest feeling, though she was conscious also of a horrible fear lest her confession might cost her Arundel. For a moment she had been tempted to withhold that confession if only for one day. She had always been

eager to clutch the moment's enjoyment. From a dream of that golden day which might have been, Greta tore herself to think of Jack. She must tell him, come what might.

It was not Greta's nature to write letters and tear them up, she put down the first words which came into her head, without even reading them over to see if they could be softened.

‘MY DEAR JACK,

‘I have made a dreadful mistake; I ought never to have promised to marry you. I know I have behaved shamefully, but I can never marry you now. Be as angry as you like, only don't be too sorry.

‘GRETA.’

Stealing down to post her letter, Greta saw Arundel come in with Fred. She hurried away, but rejoiced to find Fred following her.

‘What does he think of me?’ she could not help asking.

‘Not half so badly as you deserve,’ said Fred, sternly. ‘Now perhaps you’ll explain why you chose to keep us all in the dark.’

‘I’ve always been engaged to Jack and I’ve never talked about it. I didn’t want to be tied up. And I never thought it could do any harm.’

‘Didn’t you, indeed! Not all the time you were leading Arundel on to make a fool of himself?’

‘I never thought——’

‘Nonsense,’ cried Fred, sharply. ‘Do you mean to tell me you couldn’t see what we all saw, even mother. She didn’t like it at first, but we smoothed her over, telling her you were better than a stranger. We were so glad for your sake,’ added Fred, viciously; ‘we thought Arundel too good for you, but we did suppose that you were a harmless little thing. And I was really fond of you.’

‘You’ve been very kind, and I’m sorry you’re disappointed.’ said Greta, wearily, ‘but I’ll go away to-morrow. I’d go to-night if I could.’

‘Arundel says he’ll go. But he wants to see you once more. I don’t care whether you like it or not, you must see him. You owe him some explanation.’

‘He won’t——’ began Greta, her heart beating gladly at the thought of seeing Arundel again.

‘He won’t what—make love to you? I should think he’d had enough of that. A stupid little thing like you, and as for your Jack——’ Fred’s contempt expressed itself in something approaching a whistle. Then, remembering that she had pledged herself to help Arundel, she went on, ‘When will you see him? he’s not coming in to dinner.’

‘Oh, I can’t go to dinner, either!’ cried Greta, horrified at the prospect of a long *table-d’hôte*.

‘It might be a quiet time for you to meet. On the terrace perhaps. Come down presently ; I’ll manage it,’ said Fred.

The garden below the terrace was very still, except for the unceasing rush of the torrent when Arundel came down the path to find a white, rigid figure standing with arms half raised as if to ward him off. He stopped short before that mute defence. But Greta’s cry of poor Jack was still ringing in his ears like music.

‘You want to hear all about it,’ said Greta, in a forced voice. ‘It’s rather a long story.’

‘It can’t have been a long engagement.’

‘As long as our lives, I think, at least I suppose it didn’t begin till my mother married Mr. Daman ; I was very little then. But I can’t remember the time when Jack was not my lover.’

‘You don’t call that an engagement ? When did you promise to marry this Jack ?’

‘They said we couldn’t be really engaged until Jack was eighteen. But I wore his ring long before that.’

‘You wear no ring now.’

‘It’s round my neck.’—Arundel inwardly anathematised it.—‘But I’ve promised to marry Jack again and again,’ cried Greta, with a sort of desperation. ‘I promised to marry him in November only the day before I came away.’

This was too much. Nothing but the force of training stayed Arundel’s reproaches. For a moment he believed that the girl before him had been trifling.

‘You don’t mind torturing a man,’ he said, with a laugh which faintly indicated the words he could not use. ‘Tell me,’ he added, catching at a straw, ‘why did you call him “poor Jack” just now?’

Did Arundel catch a gleam of reproach in the mournful eyes which were trying to look steadily away from him? For he gained courage to ask,

‘Do you mean to go home and marry Jack in November?’

‘No.’

‘Greta,’ Arundel drew a little nearer; but Greta raised her slight barrier against him once more.

A sudden light glared from the dark waters, there was a flash of fire across the sky. Greta started violently.

‘Only fireworks,’ said Arundel. ‘And I thought it would have amused you so,’ he added, tenderly, looking at the shrinking figure beside him, and wondering if it could be Greta. ‘You nervous!’ he exclaimed, in his old voice.

Greta tried to laugh but her laugh was a sob. Arundel pressed his advantage.

‘Will you tell Jack that you cannot marry him?’

‘I have. No,’ she cried, checking an exclamation of triumph from the man beside her. ‘Not yet.’

‘Don’t go away suddenly as you did

before,' pleaded Arundel. 'Look at this atrocious outrage,' he added, gaily.

The château stood out white and staring like a pasteboard castle against the red fire. The Falls glittered with electric lights. But no exclamation of wonder or delight broke from Greta.

'I wish——' she began and stopped. She could not wish that she had never met Arundel. There was no going back.

'I want you to promise me one thing.' Arundel spoke softly as if fearing to scare Greta. 'Don't go home till you've heard from Jack. I'll go if I must.'

'One of us must go,' said Greta, but the words seemed wrung from her.

'I'll keep out of your way, only let me stay,' pleaded Arundel, conscious of his adversary's weakness.

'Good-night,' returned Greta, avoiding the question.

'Shake hands at least, you used to do that.'

‘It used to mean nothing,’ replied Greta, turning away with hands firmly clasped.

CHAPTER XVIII.

For a day or two Arundel kept out of the way. For another day Greta avoided Arundel. But when the last day of their stay at Rheinfels came, Fred persuaded Greta to come to the Falls in a boat. Fred had refused to go without Greta.

‘And the Pater won’t let me go without Arundel,’ she urged. ‘You needn’t mind this once. He can’t talk to you on forbidden subjects with me in the boat.’

If it had not been for a new sense of guilt, and a still keener sense of a new joy, Greta could almost have fancied that the Waldberg days had come back. Arundel was the same except for something more

distinctly deferential in his manner to herself. The swirl and dancing of the water through which they made their way, the thunder of the falling Rhine towards which they came ever nearer and nearer, seemed to enter into her very soul and lift it above fear and care. Had she obeyed the instinct which was thrilling in her, Greta would have stood erect in the prow as if to welcome and defy the avalanche of white water that rushed and charged and roared at her. The approach to the rock was made without more than the usual difficulty. The landing was, as it always is, a somewhat delicate business.

‘Please to forget I’m not a boatman,’ whispered Arundel, planting himself in front of Greta, and compelling her to take his hand. ‘I won’t risk your displeasure whilst you are on the edge of that boiling cataract.’

‘I can climb up by the rail now,’ said Greta, as soon as she had landed.

‘Go on first then. Fred won’t disdain a hand.’

‘We’ve got it all to ourselves,’ said Fred, as they reached the top and stood under the iron umbrella which they had contemplated ambitiously from the opposite shore.

‘We shan’t have it long, there’s a boat just coming off,’ remarked Arundel.

‘What fun to see it come in,’ cried Greta, ‘I hope it’s a full boat, they rock about much more.’

‘They’re more likely to upset, you mean. I didn’t expect that from you. But I begin to suspect your softness a sham,’ added Arundel, in a low voice.

Fred began waving her handkerchief as she distinguished her friends on the terrace opposite.

Arundel ventured to address Greta confidentially.

‘Have you got that thing round your neck still?’

‘No, but I’m not free.’

‘I won’t ask you to wear another to-day.’

‘This is breaking our compact.’

‘I made no compact. Fred may have promised and vowed things in my name. But I submit. Let’s look for your boat. I’m afraid there’s only one man in it.’

Greta turned, then suddenly craned forward, straining her eyes in an eager startled stare. Then, clutching the rail, she turned a white horror-struck face towards Arundel.

‘It’s Jack!’

‘I’ll speak to him,’ said Arundel, rushing quickly down the rough steps. But Greta flew after him.

‘No,’ she cried, pushing past and compelling him to give way lest she should lose her footing.

Jack did not wait for the boat to get very close. He frightened even the experienced boatman by leaping on to the

rock with an effort which buried the bows of the boat and sent it for a moment back into the dangerous eddies. As Greta stepped before his rival, he caught her roughly by the arm which Arundel had not dared to touch.

To Greta there was something moving in the unshaven, dishevelled condition of the usually spruce Jack. Even the dirty hand, which clutched her white sleeve, had a pathos of its own. But these little things told against the boy with his rival. Jack, with his glaring eyes and generally unrestrained demeanour, seemed to Arundel an abnormal combination of cad and savage. The middle of the whirlpool seemed a fitter place for such a creature than the position which he appeared to claim.

‘I’ve come to take you home,’ said Jack, hoarsely, seeming prepared to drag Greta into his boat.

‘Not by force, I suppose?’ said Arundel,

with ominous quietness, interposing himself between them. 'No,'—as Jack turned furiously upon him—'not just now, if you please. One moment, Mr. Daman,' he added, suddenly, holding the rail with one hand and extending the other to Fred, who was in the rear. 'Just allow this lady to pass.'

Jack drew instinctively aside as Fred touched his shoulder, and the dealer in sensations came delicately enough down the descent where a slip might have been a serious matter.

There were two persons between Jack and Greta now, and Fred, at a sign from Arundel, urged Greta on board the boat.

'We're not quarrelling, Miss Charlstrom, we're all coming home together,' said Arundel, with a laugh. 'This really isn't a safe place to have a row in with women about,' he whispered to Jack; then added, aloud, 'We're coming after you in Mr. Daman's boat, if he'll give me a lift.'

‘I’d much rather go with Jack,’ said Greta, mastering the sickness with which the thought of a scuffle between the two young men, in that now horrible place, filled her.

‘Greta, do come, for heaven’s sake,’ whispered Fred.

Her ghastly face said plainer than words, ‘If you don’t let Arundel manage it, there’ll be murder.’

‘Only let them get safe ashore,’ said Arundel to Jack. Then, as he saw the boat tossing on its homeward journey, he turned to him again. ‘My dear fellow, you can’t chuck me into the middle of that pool before everybody.’

‘I’m half-inclined to try.’

‘Upon my word, I’m thankful you’re not quite inclined. Of course, I’ll give you a chance if you insist, but for goodness’ sake don’t let us frighten Greta by war-like demonstrations.’

‘I’m not likely to want to frighten Miss

Charlstrom,' said Jack, with formal dignity. 'You may as well understand that she will be my wife in November.'

'Well,' said Arundel, laughing, 'you can settle that on the mainland as well as on a square foot of island. Of course I won't ask you to take me in your boat if you object.'

'You can come,' growled Jack. He had an uneasy sense of defeat, though neither in word or deed had he and Arundel been in actual conflict. But he was probably mollified by Greta's expressed wish to go with him.

When Arundel and Jack reached shore, they found Fred waiting alone at the landing-place. She addressed them sharply.

'Greta can't see either of you to-day.'

'She's not ill?' exclaimed Arundel.

Jack only made an angry protest.

'Not exactly ill,' replied Fred, giving Arundel a look which promised an explanation later. Then, turning to Jack,

she went on, 'I can take any message, a letter if you like; but it's no use making a scene at the hotel. You won't see Greta any the more. She won't see Captain Mace either, that ought to satisfy you.'

'I mean to take her home,' said Jack.

'She's quite willing to go home,' replied Fred, again telegraphing silence to Arundel. 'She'd rather have it all out at home. And she will on no account see Captain Mace before she goes.'

'Why can't she go with me to-night?'

'I think you forget that you're not really her brother,' said Fred, indignantly. 'Greta is in my father's charge, he must find her a proper escort. And I doubt whether he would even let you be of the party if he had seen you just now. Don't fancy you can carry off Greta just as you like. We shan't give you the chance.'

'You can't prevent my seeing her.'

‘We can, if she doesn’t want to. Come now,’ said Fred, good-humouredly; ‘you know you can’t rush into all the rooms at the Rheinhof till you find Greta. You’ve begun so badly that we can’t trust you; only behave like a rational being, and you may come to-morrow as early as you like—I don’t mean in the small hours of the morning.’

‘I shall sleep at the Rheinhof.’

‘I don’t think you will. They haven’t got a hole or corner empty. And you wouldn’t see Greta.’

‘Get me Greta’s written promise that she won’t see that fellow.’

‘I’ve given you her promise already, I’ll give you mine. Captain Mace will give you his.’

Fred almost stamped as Arundel declined to do anything of the kind. But Jack did not want his rival’s promise.

‘I wouldn’t take the word of a fellow who could steal another man’s sweetheart.’

Arundel's obvious defence almost burst from Fred's lips. But she felt bound to respect her friend's warning look since she was herself making large demands on his faith.

When Fred had at last wrung some sort of concession from Jack, and they had left him at the little restaurant where the boats landed their passengers, compiling an appeal to Greta, Arundel broke out with as much warmth as he could permit himself to use to a woman,

‘Why did you let Greta make that ridiculous promise?’

‘Hush,’ said Fred, looking round as if Jack might be stealing after them. ‘Greta has gone home already.’

‘Alone!’

‘What does that matter? We just caught the omnibus at the corner. She's off by this time. We had just money enough between us. The Pater knows nothing yet, you must help me tell him.’

‘That poor child with no one to look after her, no carriage secured, and a night journey.’

‘As if she cared; no harm can come to her. Don’t be foolish, but just listen to me. Jack can’t go till to-morrow, I’ll take care he doesn’t catch the first train; you must go to-night and get the start of him.’

‘Give me her address. When does the train go?’ Arundel began pulling out his watch as if that could tell him.

‘Not till the evening. You’ll have time to help me get over the Pater. He’ll be awfully angry, but he’d have been angrier if we’d had the row at the hotel. I hope there wasn’t a row as it is; I suppose Jack went there first. What an ill-conditioned boy it is.’

‘Can Greta care for him, do you think?’

‘No, she cares for you, I know it,’ cried Fred, triumphantly. ‘Don’t be down-hearted, go in and win.’

CHAPTER XIX.

To Greta in her excited state of mind the long lonely journey offered no terrors. She never thought of her comforts, which were possibly not great, since the united resources of the two girls only furnished a second-class ticket. The journey from London to Plymouth was made third-class. Luckily Arundel was not there to see.

Greta's mind was in a whirl, she felt impelled to fly back to her old life, yet hated to feel herself flying from the new life which was a revelation. Her pleasant past looked flat and dull now. She had eaten of the tree of knowledge. Her teasing, patronising relations with her boy-lover

seemed like child's play. Such love as she had given Jack had been given in unconsciousness that there was more to give. Then came a man who seemed to demand her life, and Greta had given him that which she had not even thought of giving to Jack. But between herself and Arundel lay the barrier which could not be passed without a painful, cruel conflict.

Fred's little devices were unknown to Greta. She never doubted that Jack would follow by the next train. But she wanted to get home first to tell her own story. It would be easy to tell her mother, but Greta's heart failed her a little when she thought of telling Jack's father. He happened to be the first person she met, and she saw that his face was a little changed.

'Greta,' he said, with a sort of deprecating sternness, 'you're not going to throw my boy over, are you?'

'I can't marry him now,' replied Greta, determined not to shirk the truth.

‘Then God help him!’

Blood went for something, after all. Greta felt that she had lost a friend, but she went confidently to her mother. There could be no division between them. But Mrs. Daman’s thoughts ran on the same lines as her husband’s.

‘Greta,’ she began, incredulously, ‘you’re never going to play false with poor Jack. Why, you’d break his heart.’

‘Don’t make it worse for me, mother, I can’t help myself,’ cried Greta. ‘I’d sooner cut my throat than marry that poor boy now.’

‘Don’t talk so wildly; it’s only a passing fancy,’ said the mother, looking as if she saw the world turning upside down. It seemed impossible that the comfortable family arrangement which had pleased everybody should be thrown over for a stranger.

‘It was always you and Jack,’ she went on, pleadingly. ‘I remember how father

used to say, "My boy's grandfather may try to keep him away from me, but your girl's too strong for him." You were little things then, but it was always the same. There never was such a pair of lovers. We were so proud of you, and to think that my girl should be the false one.'

'Don't be too sure of that,' said Aunt Sophy, who had been very quiet, watching her opportunity.

Greta made a quick, impatient movement, but Mrs. Daman went on, taking no heed.

'Who is this Captain Mace that he should upset everything? A man you couldn't bear only a few weeks ago.'

'I never disliked him,' said Greta, who was beginning to know herself. 'I was always thinking about him, always excited about him from the beginning. I wanted him to like me, though I used to pretend I didn't care. Oh! I know now,' she cried, as new light broke on the past, 'I

was never quite myself after that first fortnight, everything seemed much flatter than it did before. But it wasn't much then, if I had never seen him again I might have forgotten, I can't now.'

'Yes, you can,' said her mother, with unusual determination. 'Think of poor Jack who loves you so. What can this man care. Wasn't he going to marry that poor girl who died?'

'Better a dead rival than a living one,' said Aunt Sophy, in a grim voice, 'and it ought to be rather a recommendation that Captain Mace was thought a good match for General Charlstrom's daughter.'

'Of course you mean Opal!' said Greta, who had only heeded the first words.

She spoke rather defiantly.

'I do mean Opal. You didn't condescend to notice my warning; it didn't matter to you, perhaps. Will you take my advice now? Don't slip between two stools. If

this man wants to marry you, take him, and let Jack be a dog in the manger, if he likes.'

Mrs. Daman broke in.

'Jack never cared for Opal, I'm sure of that. If he did flirt with her a little it was only because she threw herself at his head, and Greta was away ; it was nothing.'

'Meeting on the sly and walking home together every day was nothing, wasn't it?' said Miss Gay, viciously, 'or sitting in the billiard-room till eleven o'clock at night, or kissing in the school-room.'

Greta was roused at last. But her loyalty died hard.

'I won't believe it,' she exclaimed.

'You won't believe me, you mean. Well, I wasn't the only person to see them. Ask anybody in the place, ask the servants.'

'I shall ask no one but Opal herself,' said Greta, turning away.

Opal was in the school-room, with Bow-

wow in her favourite position at her feet.

‘Run away, darling, I want to talk to Opal,’ said Greta, bending down to kiss her little sister.

But Bowwow hid her face and jerked her shoulder impatiently.

‘Go away,’ she cried, ‘I can’t bear you. What have you done to poor Jack?’

Opal rose, and put the child gently out at the door; then turning, faced Greta. Bowwow’s desertion had been another home-thrust. Greta’s face worked as she spoke.

‘I want you to tell me the truth, Opal, for all our sakes. Is there any truth in what Aunt Sophy tells me?’

‘I suppose I can guess what you mean.’

‘I’ll put it more plainly. Has Jack ever made love to you?’

‘Should you care if he had—no, no,’ Opal cried, with an air of sudden bewilderment. ‘I didn’t mean to say that. You want to betray me into saying something

to hurt him, and I won't. He's the best friend I ever had, I won't say a word that can be twisted against him,' she repeated, incoherently.

'Perhaps it wouldn't hurt him if he's such a friend of yours.'

'But he wants to marry you, he likes you best,' exclaimed Opal, with an apparent effort. 'I would never stand in his way; I won't help Miss Gay to make mischief.'

'I only want to know if it's true, that he met you, sat alone with you——' Greta could not bring herself to finish the accusation.

'You've got me in your power; I don't care what you think of me, but don't make me tell tales of him. You don't know what I owe him. He saved my life,' cried Opal, dramatically, 'that was months ago, but he wouldn't let me tell you. He saved my good name when Miss Gay made a plot against me, only a few weeks ago. He was so good to me, I could tell him every-

thing, things I didn't dare tell you. I would kill myself rather than spoil his life, and he likes you best,' she repeated, as if the words were wrung from her by a generous impulse.

'Thank you,' said Greta, coldly; 'I meant to ask you to come and answer Aunt Sophy, but I think you've told enough.'

As she went to hide herself upstairs, Greta felt sickened by the revelation of falsehood which had been surrounding her unawares. There must have been an understanding between these two throughout. Jack had always spoken of Opal in somewhat slighting terms, yet he had been winning her love, and sharing her secrets all the time. Opal had gauged her rival rightly. Greta made no more allowance for passing infidelities than any other honest girl of nineteen would. Her own blunt breach of promise seemed candid and whole-hearted beside those lapses from

integrity of which Opal's ingenious apology had left Jack accused.

Greta felt impatient now for the interview which she had dreaded. She calculated the hour when Jack could arrive, giving him the shortest possible time in which to accomplish his journey.

But the unhappy boy was still delayed by the unscrupulous manœuvres of his rival's partisan. Jack had only reached the Rheinhof in time to hear that General Charlstrom's party had left for Lucerne. He followed them, to find that Greta was no longer in their company.

Meanwhile the journey which Greta had marked out was accomplished, though not by Jack. Sitting alone, waiting and watching, she heard an arrival just when she had timed it. Resolved that no third person should come between her and Jack, she opened the door directly a step sounded in the hall. 'Come in here,' she said, and some one came in.

Greta started back as she saw that it was Arundel. But it was too late. He had taken her hand, he was telling her the story which she had made him leave untold.

Arundel had caught Greta in a weak moment. There was no cry of 'poor Jack' now. Resentment and distrust seemed to have closed her heart against him. Perhaps they only clouded her judgment and perverted her sense of right. Unconsciously she may have grasped at an excuse for following her own will. She listened, knowing that to listen meant to capitulate.

'You do like me a little bit, don't you?' asked Arundel, encroaching as he found himself gain a hearing.

'Of course I like you; it would be easy enough if I didn't.'

'And you won't let them persuade you to throw me over, the moment my back's turned?'

Greta winced.

‘I suppose you’ll never trust me?’

‘I didn’t mean that, but you know you’re only beginning to thaw a little, whilst I’ve loved you from the moment you came into that great room at Lancaster Gate, with your head very erect and a suggestion of crumpled rose-leaves in your aspect. And I know it must be hard for a girl to go against her own people,’ he added, gently.

‘I hope you won’t mind, but I’m afraid you’ll get a cold reception.’

‘I got rather a warm one from a pretty little thing I met in the hall. Your sister, I should think, by her masterful spirit.’

‘Poor Bowwow, she’d be very rude to you, I daresay. But my mother is sure to be nice.’

‘Will you present me to her. Only give me a few minutes first. You haven’t really promised to be my wife.’

‘You mustn’t mind waiting a long time.

And you must go off to your father as you promised.'

'I don't mean to go further than Plymouth at present. My father will be delighted when he hears the cause. As to your other condition, we may defer that for a few days at least.'

But Arundel lost no time in pressing his own view of the matter on Greta's mother. Greta had presented him with an air of decision which he found very encouraging. Then she had left the two together to make friends. She knew that Arundel would find a short way to her mother's favour if he could talk about herself.

To Mrs. Daman it seemed the most natural thing in the world that any man should lose his head at the first glimpse of Greta. Her heart clung to Jack, yet she was not without a sense of triumph at her daughter's conquest. It seemed a more distinct tribute to Greta's beauty than the love of a boy who had known her all his

life. Mrs. Daman liked Arundel's eagerness for a speedy marriage. A lover who held off from clinching his bargain was only half a lover in her eyes. Besides, an engagement to Arundel, with Jack in the way, offered many difficulties. If the wedding was to be, it had much better take place before November. Though willing to forward Arundel's wishes on this point, Mrs. Daman supported her daughter's opinion on the other. She declared it to be impossible for Arundel to stay in the neighbourhood or to visit at the house whilst Jack was at home.

'It would kill Greta to have scenes between you two,' she pleaded.

In her heart she probably feared her husband almost as much as Jack. She was secretly eager to get Arundel out of the way before Mr. Daman returned.

'You mustn't take it amiss that I don't ask you to stay,' she observed, as he made no sign of moving. 'Jack may be home

any minute. You can write to Greta. You've got her promise, that ought to satisfy you. She's as true as steel.'

It was scarcely the moment to laud Greta's constancy, but Arundel was not likely to take exception.

'I may see her before I go,' he said, deferentially, though he had not the smallest intention of leaving without.

Mrs. Daman immediately called her daughter, who came in, followed closely by Aunt Sophy. This member of the family was prepared to receive the new-comer with open arms, and Arundel, who knew nothing of her except that she claimed kindred with his Greta, met her friendliness fully half-way. Not having much experience to guide her, Miss Gay would have insisted on seeing Arundel out, if Mrs. Daman had not intervened.

For fully ten minutes, which seemed to her like hours, the mother kept her sister in conversation, whilst she listened fearfully for

Mr. Daman's step. With a long breath of relief, she heard the hall door slammed. Then she heard Greta run upstairs. Five minutes later Mr. Daman came in.

'Who was that jaunty-looking chap I met round the corner?' he asked suspiciously.

Strangers were so rare in Avonuish that Mr. Daman, like Bowwow, had suspected Arundel's identity at once.

'That captain hasn't been here, has he?'

Mrs. Daman's silence was an answer.

'I hope you showed him the door. Where's Jack?'

'Not home yet.'

Mr. Daman's face showed sharp anxiety.

'No letter? And that fellow came from the same place. Why couldn't Jack get back too?'

'Jack's all right, you may be sure of that.'

'What do you know about him, have you heard anything?'

Mrs. Daman had never even asked after poor Jack, she had been only thankful to find his return delayed.

‘Where’s Greta?’ asked Mr. Daman.

‘She’s not very well, she’s been upset, poor girl. Captain Mace has been here; he won’t come again,’ she added, hastily, ‘but it’s no use blinking facts. Greta likes him, and she’ll never marry poor Jack now.’

‘If she means to marry anyone else she shan’t stop here,’ said Mr. Daman, with as much fury as he could muster; ‘she may go away to her fine friends altogether if she can’t keep her word.’

‘Then I shall go too, I won’t forsake my girl.’

Mrs. Daman’s flash of spirit died out suddenly as Bowwow ran in.

‘He’s been here,’ cried the child to her father, ‘he stayed an hour-and-a-half. But I wouldn’t speak to him, I mean I wouldn’t be friends with him. I told him I hated

him, and I hoped he'd go away and get killed in a battle.'

'That's right, I wish they'd all told him the same,' said Mr. Daman.

'How did you know who it was?' asked the mother.

'He wanted to come in so,' replied the little observer, who had done her best to bar the way. 'I ran out thinking it was Jack,—why doesn't Jack come home?'

Bowwow pointedly addressed her father. The division in the house was complete. Miss Gay ran upstairs to caution Greta against showing herself, whilst Mrs. Daman went to sit through a miserable dinner. Mr. Daman went on with his grievance, heedless of hints to regard the presence of servants. Aunt Sophy and Bowwow snapped at each other in the heat of unrestrained partisanship. Mrs. Daman sat wondering how long Greta would consent to remain upstairs, and whether the Charlstroms would soon come home and offer to

take her in. Only a few days before she had been longing for her child's return, now she was wishing to send her away. And Arundel would soon take her away altogether. Mrs. Daman had counted on keeping Greta always, married or single. There could be no such happy arrangement now.

‘Mothers of plain daughters are spared a great deal, after all,’ she observed plaintively to her sister; ‘nothing of this sort will ever trouble Mrs. Price,’ she added, naming the rector's wife, whose daughters were singularly ill-favoured.

‘Let's hope Bowwow may grow up like Nelly Price,’ returned Miss Gay, with grim humour; ‘there's always hope for a child.’

‘She could never be a bit like her,’ cried the mother, flushing all over.

Mrs. Daman watched for her husband to fall asleep after dinner, as usual, but

for once he kept awake. Anxiety about Jack made him restless and irritable.

‘Tell her on no account to come down,’ whispered Mrs. Daman to Opal, who was only too glad to be furnished with an excuse for forcing herself upon Greta. It was something new to find Greta sitting quite still. But she had something to think of now. It might have been well if she had learned to hold communion with herself sooner.

‘Come in,’ she said, in answer to Opal’s knock, expecting to see her mother.

Opal gave her message, but still lingered.

‘I like to be alone,’ said Greta.

‘I must speak to you.’

‘Then please make it short.’

‘I don’t know whether you owe me a grudge. But I can show you how to be revenged. Only tell Jack what you asked me, tell him I wasn’t so ready with my lies as I ought to have been, he’ll think I

tried to divide you. But I didn't,' cried Opal, clasping her hands and twisting her lithe frame in a manner peculiar to herself. 'You never cared for him; I knew it all along, for I loved him. He loved me too in a way; but he'll never forgive me if you make me your excuse for marrying the man you do love.'

Opal's voice rose till the last words came out with a force which made them resound in Greta's ears. Then, without giving Greta the chance of reply, she made a good stage exit.

CHAPTER XX.

‘I SHALL never change again ; I know myself now. It’s Arundel, or being an old maid,’ said Greta, with an energy which silenced her mother.

It was the day after Arundel’s visit. And Mrs. Daman, who had pronounced her daughter to be as true as steel, was already trying to bring back the old comfortable state of things.

‘I stand by Captain Mace,’ said Aunt Sophy, drawing her work-basket to her, ‘and I mean to get on with the trousseau ; it may be wanted sooner than we thought. Try to do a bit of work, Greta.’

‘If things were happier I almost think

I could,' replied Greta, looking with new eyes on the work. 'It all seemed so prosaic somehow when I was going to marry Jack. I suppose I should have jogged on without knowing; I used to laugh at romance, but now—I feel like Undine when she had found her soul,' cried Greta, quoting a favourite story of Bowwow's in a desperate effort to make her mother understand. But Mrs. Daman had married twice without tasting Greta's present experience. Children had made the romance of her life. It was easier for the old maid to comprehend than for her.

'I don't see that Undine was any the happier for getting a soul,' she remarked, doubtfully.

'But she wouldn't have gone back. I can't be happy, I've behaved too badly; but I wouldn't go back to what I was a year ago,' cried Greta, pressing her hand against a letter from Arundel, his first

letter which had come to her that morning. She used to hand Jack's letters round the family, there had been nothing in his words to make them sacred.

Greta had told Arundel to go away, and he had obeyed her so far as to leave Plymouth. But he still lingered in the west country, and the knowledge relieved her sense of loneliness.

'I don't like runaway matches,' said Mrs. Daman; 'but upon my word it seems as if that would be the shortest way out of our difficulty.'

'What a pity Gretna Green's had its day, it would be so handy for Arundel's father,' cried Greta, with a flash of her old fun, which died out suddenly as she heard the door-bell ring.

It was an unexpected visitor, Mrs. Randall. Greta recognised the hand of Arundel, who had found a friend for her. But Fred had in truth been the chief mover in

the matter, since Arundel had only seen Mrs. Randall for the first time the evening before.

Mrs. Randall might have known him all her life from the warmth with which she spoke of him and offered her congratulations. Being good-natured, fond of Greta, and still fonder of a love affair, Mrs. Randall had responded warmly to Fred's request for a helping hand. She felt that Greta must on no account be allowed to let a rich lover slip through her fingers. As for Jack's claims, Mrs. Randall made very light of them.

‘ Ah yes, a boy-and-girl affair,’ she remarked, when Greta made some allusion to her difficulties, ‘ you never told me anything about that, and as for guessing, why, we all thought you were within the prohibited degrees, I'm sure you ought to be. But the best plan will be for you to come and stay with me a little while, if your

mother will spare you, till all that has blown over.'

Mrs. Daman would have jumped at this offer, especially since she found that Mrs. Randall was prepared to carry Greta off at once, but Greta refused to move till she had seen Jack. The idea of flying from him to hide herself in a house to which he might be refused admission, seemed to her cowardly and unfair.

'I must tell him myself,' she repeated, standing out against all persuasions. 'If you will take me in afterwards, I shall be thankful to come.'

'It would be so much better to write to him.'

'He would never be satisfied with a letter.'

'You're a self-willed child. Some one told me so,' said Mrs. Randall, as she left half displeased.

'I seem to make everyone angry,'

observed Greta, looking as if she wondered why life had become so difficult.

‘You’re half hearted,’ returned Aunt Sophy, ‘you won’t throw Jack over once for all. I shouldn’t wonder if Captain Mace gets out of patience now.’

‘I’m not afraid of that. And I’m not half hearted, I shall break with Jack’—Greta caught her breath—‘as thoroughly as you can wish, but I must do it by word of mouth.’

‘I hope you’ll tell him that you’ve found out about his goings-on with that Opal; you may give me as your authority.’

‘No, there shall be nothing of that sort. I know I’m false, I won’t pretend it’s because he’s false too. Don’t try to make mischief between him and Opal. If he wants to marry her, let him.’

Greta had given no answer to Opal, but the girl felt tolerably confident as to the success of her appeal. She hung about

the lanes, with Bowwow, hoping to catch Jack and have the first word. No one heeded how the governess and pupil passed their time. Mrs. Daman was always content to know that they were out of doors. Wandering in lonely country roads was not to Opal's taste, but she was driven by a feeling strong enough to master all others.

Bowwow had been worked up into a perfect frenzy of partisanship. Always devoted to Jack and jealous of his interests, with a lively fancy and the wisdom of eight years, she was ready to believe in plots. Eager to warn Jack, she marshalled Opal the way the latter was going.

When their patience was at last rewarded by the appearance of a dusty, jaded looking traveller tramping along at a pace which would have shamed the local steeds, it was Bowwow who flew to him, and with unconscious cruelty poured out her story.

Jack heard it with a face which cut Opal to the quick though not from any pity for him. She offered a gentle apology for the child's abruptness, whilst Bowwow clung to Jack crying. Bowwow had believed that somehow everything must come right when Jack was once home. As they drew near the house, Opal breathed a few words of counsel to Jack.

‘Be firm, insist on your rights, be masterful like this other man,’ she added, as a crowning argument.

Arundel's hand, whatever its consistency, had always worn a silken glove for Greta. Even at the moment when she had tried him most he had permitted his anger no expression. Jack, on the contrary, rushed at Greta as if he found relief in giving vent to his rage. The trick which he supposed her to have played, in sending him on a wild-goose chase to Lucerne, had roused his temper even before Bowwow's story stirred him to fury.

‘You thought to get rid of me whilst you settled it all,’ he cried, ‘but I’m not going to be put aside. I’ve got your promise, and I’ll make you keep it. You expected me home every day, did you?’ he exclaimed, scarcely giving her time to speak, ‘you think I’m going to believe that; I trusted you once, I won’t trust you out of my sight now. I’ll never let you go again.’

This unbridled anger, this rough insistence on rights, stood out in sharp contrast against Arundel’s forbearance. Nothing, Greta thought, would have made him speak so to any woman. She had come out to meet Jack with a shade of softness and humility in her manner. His mode of receiving her seemed ungenerous; remembering what she knew of his relations with Opal, it seemed almost base. But Greta made no retort.

‘Say what you like, if it does you any good,’ she said, with a meekness which sat strangely upon her.

Nothing that Jack could have said would have moved Greta to marry him now, but he could have touched her heart and revived the old tenderness so far as it went. A feeling almost like contempt, a distorted and exaggerated reflection of her old good-humoured patronage, possessed her now as she heard him storm and threaten in pitiful impotence.

Suddenly Greta's coldness smote Jack. She had not usually been much moved by his fits of passion, but she had never received them in this silent, stony fashion.

'It's no use talking to an image,' he cried, with a sort of despair, throwing his arms roughly about her.

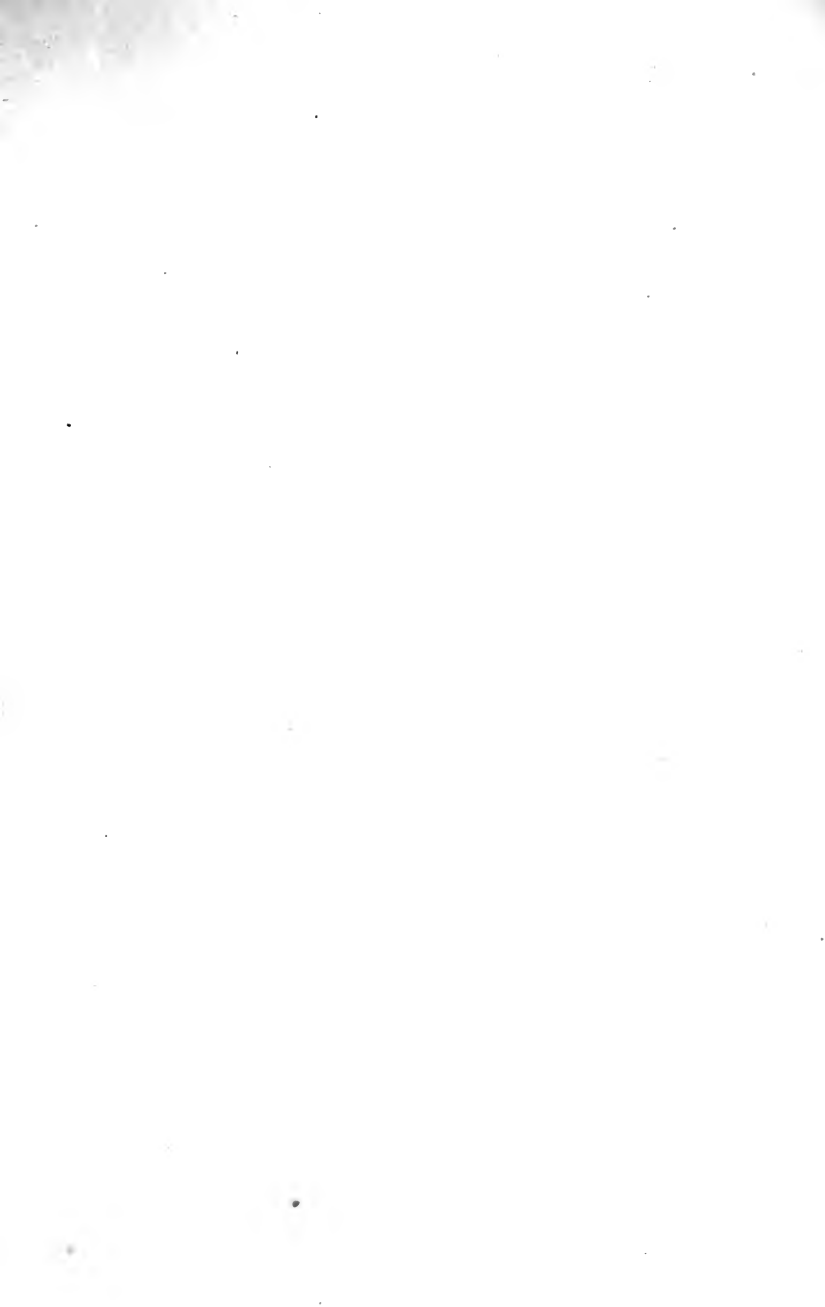
Greta struggled, winding herself round and twisting her face back over her shoulder. Then, as he persisted, she drove both hands against his chest, striving to push him from her with such evident resentment that he drew back. It seemed

like a declaration of war. For a moment they stood looking at each other, then Greta, with eyes still fixed fearfully on Jack, retreated towards the door. He made no attempt to detain her, but rushed out into the open air.

Hours later Jack returned to find that Greta had gone away, they would not tell him where. She had left a letter for him. Snatching it from Mrs. Daman's hand, he tore it to pieces.

Next day Jack too left home, and no one except Opal knew where he went.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA



3 0112 042061488